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Howard P. Country
Pastor
Angelus Temple

1100 Glendal Blvd

Los Angeles Calif.

June 7, 1978



Engraved by J. Roberts.

JACOBS WELL, NEAR SHECHEN.

Remains of the Temple on Mount Gerizim in the distance

PLATE II.

THE
LIFE OF CHRIST

BY THE
REV. WILLIAM HANNA, D.D., LL.D.

VOL. I.

EARLIER YEARS,
AND
MINISTRY IN GALILEE.

NEW YORK:
ROBERT CARTER AND BROTHERS.
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THE EARLIER YEARS

OF

OUR LORD'S LIFE ON EARTH.

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GENERAL PREFACE.

THE Lectures of which these volumes consist were all written in the course of weekly preparation for the pulpit, and are given as they were delivered Sunday after Sunday to an ordinary but well-educated Christian congregation. This fact will sufficiently explain the presence in them of much that might otherwise be regarded as irrelevant or superfluous, and the absence of much that might otherwise have been deemed essential.

Using the best critical helps, home and foreign, that were within his reach, the writer was, in the first instance, at pains to read aright and harmonize the accounts given by the different Evangelists. Out of the materials so supplied, his aim has been to construct a continuous narrative of the leading incidents in our Saviour's life — presented in such a form as might bring out as vividly as possible, not only the sequence and connection of the events, but the motives and feelings of the different actors and spectators, dwelling especially upon every thing that served to exhibit or illustrate the great Central Character.

Seven years ago a portion of these Lectures was published in a volume entitled *The Last Day of our Lord's Passion*.

The favorable reception given to this volume, its translation into the Dutch, French, and German languages, and its adoption for circulation by two of the leading Societies for the diffusion of Christian literature on the Continent, encouraged the author to persevere and to issue annually, in succession, the five additional volumes by which the series is now completed.

Although ever bearing in mind the attempts that in recent years have been made to impugn the credibility or reduce the significance of the Gospel narrative, the writer has abstained from all historical, critical, and doctrinal discussions, as alien from his object. He trusts, however, that such a simple recital of the incidents in Christ's life as the following pages present, may help to create or to deepen the conviction that the natural and supernatural are so inseparably interwoven in the narrative that if you take away the latter you leave the former inexplicable — the blending of the two being essential to the coherence and consistency of the record; and that the human and the divine so meet and mingle in the complex character of our Lord, and in their combination were so singularly illustrated in his words and acts, that if his divinity be denied, his humanity becomes mutilated, stained, and degraded.

EDINBURGH, 6 CASTLE TERRACE,
15th October, 1869.

I.

THE ANNUNCIATION—MARY AND ELIZABETH.*

IN the sixth month"—half a year from the time when, within the holy place at Jerusalem, he had stood on the right side of the altar of incense, and announced to the incredulous Zacharias the birth of the Baptist—the angel Gabriel was sent to an obscure Galilean village to announce a still greater birth,—that of the Divine Redeemer of mankind. As we open, then, the first page in the history of our Lord's earthly life, we come at once into contact with the supernatural. The spirit-world unfolds itself; some of its highest inhabitants become palpable to sense, and are seen to take part in human affairs. In the old patriarchal and prophetic ages angels frequently appeared conversing with Abraham and Hagar, and Lot and Jacob; instructing in their ignorance, or com-

* Luke i. 26-56.

forting in their distress, or strengthening in their weakness Joshua and Gideon, and Elijah and Daniel and Zechariah. Excluding, however, those instances in which it was the Angel of the Covenant who appeared, the cases of angelic manifestation were comparatively rare, and lie very thinly scattered over the four thousand years which preceded the birth of Christ. Within the half century that embraced this life we have more instances of angelic interposition than in all the foregoing centuries of the world's history. At its opening and at its close angels appear as taking a special interest in events which had little of outward mark to distinguish them. Gabriel announces to Zacharias the birth of John, to Mary the birth of Jesus. An angel warns Joseph in a dream to take the young child down to Egypt. On the night of the great birth, and for the first time on earth, a multitude of the heavenly host is seen. In the garden of Gethsemane, an angel comes to strengthen our Lord in his great agony. On the morning of the Resurrection angels appear now sitting, now standing, within and without the sepulchre, as if they thronged around the place where the body of the Lord had lain. When from the top of Olivet the cloud carried

the rising Jesus out of the apostles' sight, two angels stand beside the apostles as they gaze so steadfastly up into the heavens, and foretell his second coming. Nor do they withdraw from human sight when the ministry of our Lord has closed. Mingling with the other miraculous agency whereby the kingdom of Christ was established and extended, theirs appears. An angel releases Peter, commissions Philip, instructs Cornelius, smites Herod, stands amid the terrors of the shipwreck before Paul.

Is there aught incredible in this? If there be indeed a world of spirits, and in that world Christ fills the place our faith attributes to him; if in that world there be an innumerable company of angels; if the great design of our Lord's visit to this earth was to redeem our sinful race to God, and unite us with the unfallen members of his great family—then it was not unnatural that those who had worshipped around his throne should bend in wonder over his cradle, stand by his side in his deep agony, roll away the stone rejoicing from his sepulchre and attend him as the everlasting doors were lifted up, when, triumphant over death and hell, he resumed his place on the eternal throne. When the father brought his first

begotten into the world, the edict was, "Let all the angels of God worship him." Shall we wonder, then, that this worship, in one or two of its acts, should be made manifest to human vision, as if to tell us what an interest the Incarnation excited, if not in the minds of men, in another and higher branch of the great community of spirits? From the beginning angels were interested spectators of what transpired on earth. When under the moulding hand of the Great Creator the present economy of material things was spread forth—so good, so beautiful—they sang together, they shouted for joy. When sin and death made their dark entrance, angels stood by, hailing the first beams of light that fell upon the darkness, welcoming the first human spirit that made its way into the heavenly mansions. The slow development of the divine purposes of mercy in the history of human redemption, they watched with eager eye. Still closer to our earth they gathered, still more earnest was their gaze as the Son of the Eternal prepared to leave the glory he had with the Father that he might come down and tabernacle as a man among us. And when the great event of his Incarnation at last took place, it looked for

a short season as if they were to mingle visibly in the affairs of men, and of that new kingdom which the Ancient of Days set up. It was the Son of God who brought these good angels down along with him. He has mediated not only between us and the Father, but between us and that elder branch of the great commonwealth of spirits, securing their services for us here, preparing us for their society hereafter. He has taught them to see in us that seed out of which the places left vacant by the first revolt in heaven are to be filled. He has taught us to see in them our elder brethren, to a closer and eternal fellowship with whom we are hereafter to be elevated. Already the interchange of kindly offices has commenced. Though since he himself has gone they have withdrawn from human vision, they have not withdrawn from earthly service under the Redeemer. Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation? Who shall recount to us wherein that gracious ministry of theirs consists? who shall prove it to be a fancy, that as they waited to bear away the spirit of Lazarus to Abraham's bosom, they hover round the death-bed of the believer still, the tread of their footstep, the

stroke of their wing unheard as they waft the departing spirit to its eternal home?

“The angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man, whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary.” Little information is given in the Gospels as to the previous history either of Joseph or Mary. He, we are told, was of the house of David, of royal lineage by direct descent; but that line now fallen so low that he was but a village tradesman, a carpenter. Mary too, we have reason to believe, was also of the royal stock of David; yet in so humble a condition of life as made it natural that she should be betrothed to Joseph. This betrothal had taken place, and the new hopes it had excited agitate the youthful Mary’s heart. She is alone in her dwelling, when, lifting up her eyes, she sees the form of the angel, and hears his voice say unto her: “Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.” To Zacharias he had spoken at once by name, and had proceeded without prelude to deliver the message with which he had been charged. He enters more reverently this humble abode at Nazareth

than he had entered the holy place of the great Temple at Jerusalem. He stands more reverently before this youthful maiden than before the aged priest. He cannot open to her his message till he has offered her such homage as heavenly messenger never paid to any member of our race. Is it any wonder that saluted so by one who, wearing, as in all likelihood he did, our human form, was yet like no man she had ever seen, Mary should have been "troubled at his saying,"—troubled as she felt the privacy of her seclusion thus invaded, and looked upon that strange, unearthly, yet most attractive form which stood before her? She is not so troubled however as to hinder her from casting in her thoughts "what manner of salutation this should be." She receives the salutation in silence, with surprise, with awe, with thoughtful wonder. In sympathy with feelings depicted in her alarmed yet inquiring countenance, Gabriel hastens to relieve her fears, and satisfy her curiosity. "Fear not," he says, after a brief pause. "Fear not, Mary;" the very familiar mention of her name carrying with it an antidote against alarm. "Fear not, Mary; for thou hast found favor with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive

in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest ; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David : and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever ; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

There was scarce a mother in Israel, in those days, who did not cherish it as the very highest object of desire and ambition to be the mother of the promised Messiah. Mary was a mother in Judah, and the man to whom she was betrothed belonged also to that stock from which the Messiah was to spring. Perhaps the hope had already dawned that this great honor might be in store for her. Her devout and thoughtful habits had made her familiar with the old prophecies that foretold the Messiah's advent, and with the manner in which his kingdom was there spoken of. Obscure and mysterious as much of what Gabriel said may have appeared to her, she seems at once to have apprehended that it was of the birth of this great son of David that he was speaking. She does not ask, she seems not to have needed any information on that point. Nor does she hesitate to accept as true all that Gabriel had

declared. She puts indeed a question which, if its meaning had not been interpreted by the manner in which Gabriel dealt with it, and by the subsequent conduct of Mary herself, we might have regarded as akin to that of Zacharias; as indicating that she too had given way to incredulity. But hers was a question of curiosity, not of unbelief; a question akin, not to the one which Zacharias put about the birth of John, but to that of Abraham about the birth of Isaac, when he said to the angel, Whereby shall I know this? a question implying no failure of faith, for we know that Abraham staggered not at the promise through unbelief, but expressive simply of a desire for further information, for some sign in confirmation of his faith. He got such a sign and rejoiced. And so with Mary: her question, like the patriarch's, springing not from the spirit of a hesitating unbelief, but from natural curiosity, and the wish to have the faith she felt confirmed. Her desire was granted. She was told that the Holy Ghost should come upon her, that the power of the Highest should overshadow her, that the child afterwards to be born was now miraculously to be conceived. And as a sign, this piece of information, new

to her we may believe, was given, that her relative, the aged Elizabeth, was also to have a son. Her question having been answered, and the manner of the great event so far revealed as to throw her back simply on the promise and power of God, Mary says: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." What a contrast here between Zacharias and Mary! The aged man had been taught from childhood in one of the schools of the prophets, and must have been familiar with all those narratives and prophecies which might have prepared him to believe, and he had besides the experience of years to give power to his trust in God. Mary was of humbler parentage; her opportunities of instruction but meagre compared with his; hers too was the season of inexperienced youth; her faith was as yet unfortified by trial. What he was asked to believe was unlikely indeed, and altogether unlooked for, yet not beyond the powers of nature. What she is asked to believe is a direct miraculous forthputting of the great power of God. Yet the old priest staggers, while the young maiden instantly confides.

In Mary's immediate and entire belief of the angel's word, a far greater confidence in God

was shown than could have been shown by Zacharias, even had he received Gabriel's message as she did, without a suspicion or a doubt. She who, being betrothed, proved unfaithful, was, by the law of Moses, sentenced to be stoned to death, and though that law had now fallen into disuse, or was but seldom literally executed, yet she who was deemed guilty of such a crime stood exposed to the loss of character, and became the marked object of public opprobrium. Mary could not fail at once to perceive, and to be sensitive to the misconceptions and the perils which she would certainly incur. She might, in self-vindication, relate what Gabriel had told her, but how many would believe her word? What voucher could she give that it was actually a heavenly messenger she had seen, and that what he had said was true? Many a distressing fear as to the future,—as to the treatment she might receive from Joseph, the calumnies, the shame, the scorn to which from other quarters she might be exposed,—might have arisen, if not to check her faith, yet to hold her own acquiescence in the will of God in timid and trembling suspense; but strong in the simplicity and fulness of her trust, she puts all fears away, and committing herself

into the hands of him whose Angel she believes Gabriel to be, she says, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord ; be it unto me according to thy word."

Let us notice one other element in Mary's faith : its humility, its complete freedom from that undue thought of self which so often taints the faith of the most believing. Wonderful as the announcement is, that a child born of her should, by such miraculous conception as Gabriel had spoken of, be the Son of the Highest, should be a King sitting on the throne of David—his kingdom one that should outrival David's, of which there never should be an end,—Mary harbors no doubt, raises no question, thinks not, speaks not of her own unworthiness to have such honor conferred on her, or of her unfitness to be the mother of such a child. As if one so unworthy of the least of God's mercies had no right or title to question his doings, however great a gift it pleased him to confer, she sinks all thought of self in thought of him, and says, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord , be it unto me according to thy word." A finer instance of simple, humble, childlike, unbroken trust, we shall scarcely find in any record, human or divine. "Blessed," let us say with her

cousin Elizabeth, "is she that believed : for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord. Thou hast found favor," said Gabriel to her, "with God." It is possible to interpret that saying without any reference to Mary's character ; to rest in the explanation, which is no doubt so far true, that it was God's good pleasure to select out of all the maidens of Israel this Mary of Nazareth, to be the most honored of the daughters of Eve. But if it be true, as we are elsewhere taught, that to him that hath it is given ; that it is done unto every one according to his faith ; that to him that believeth, all things are possible ; if all the recorded experience of God's people confirms these general sayings of the Divine word,—are we wrong in considering the high honor conferred by God on Mary as a striking exemplification of the principle of adapting the gift to the character and capacity of the receiver ?

His errand accomplished, Gabriel withdrew ; and after the brief and exciting interview, Mary was left in solitude to her own thoughts. The words she had so lately heard kept ringing in her ears. She tried to enter more and more into their meaning. As she did so, into what

a tumult of wonder, and awe, and hope, must she have been thrown! She longs for some one with whom she can converse, to whom she may unburden her full mind and heart. There is no one near to whom she can or dare lay open all her secret thoughts; but she remembers now what Gabriel had told her about her kinswoman Elizabeth, who may well be intrusted with the secret, for she too has been placed in something like the same condition. Eager for sympathy, thirsting for companionship and full communion of the heart, she arises in haste, and departs for the distant residence of her cousin, who lives amid the far-off hills of Judah. It is a long—for one so young and so unprotected, it might be, a perilous journey; nearly the whole length of the land—at least a hundred miles to traverse. But what is distance, what are dangers to one so lifted up with the exalted hopes to which she has been begotten! The hundred miles are quickly trodden; joy and hope make the long distance short. She reaches at last the house in which Elizabeth resides, and, with all due respect—such as is due from the inferior in station, the junior in years—she salutes the wife of the venerable priest. How filled with wonder must she have

been, when instead of the ordinary return to her salutation, Elizabeth breaks forth at once with the exclamation, "Blessed art thou among women;" the very words which the angel had so lately spoken in her astonished ear; "and blessed is the fruit of thy womb." She need not tell her secret; it is already known. What a fresh warrant this for the truth of all that Gabriel had said! It comes to confirm a faith already strong, but which might, perhaps, otherwise have begun to falter. It did not waver in the angel's presence; but had month after month gone by, with no one near to share her thoughts, or build her up in her first trust, might not that trust have yielded to human weakness, and shown some symptom of decay? Well-timed, then, the kindly aid which the strange greeting of her cousin brought with it, supplying a new evidence that there should indeed be a performance of all those things which were told of the Lord.

"And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" If in Mary we have one of the rarest exhibitions of humility towards God, of entire acquiescence in his will; in Elizabeth we have as rare and beautiful an instance of humility towards others, the

entire absence of all selfish, proud, and envious feelings. Elizabeth leaves out of sight all the outer distinctions between herself and her humbler relative, forgets the difference of age and rank, recognizes at once, and ungrudgingly, the far higher distinction which had been conferred by God upon Mary, and wonders even at the fact that to such a home as hers the honored mother of her Lord should come. But now the same spirit which had enlightened her eyes, and filled her heart, and opened her lips to give such greeting to her cousin, comes in still fuller measure upon Mary, and to the wonderful salutation she gives a still more wonderful response in that strain of rapt and rhythmical praise which the Holy Catholic Church has ever treasured as the first and fullest of our Christian hymns.

It divides itself into two parts. Rising at once to God as the source of all her blessings, her soul and all that was within her being stirred up to bless him, she celebrates, in lofty strains of praise, the Lord's goodness to herself individually. "My soul doth magnify the Lord." The Lord had magnified her, by his goodness had made her great, and she will magnify the Lord. The larger his gift to her,

the larger the glory she will render to his great name. "My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. She hails the coming Saviour, as one needed by her as by all sinners, and embraces him, though her own son according to the flesh, as her God and Saviour; glorying more in the connexion that she has with him in common with the entire multitude of the redeemed, than in that special maternal relationship in which she has the privilege to stand to him. Royal though her lineage, hers had been a low estate; her family poor in Judah; she among the least in her father's house; but in his great grace and infinite condescension the Lord had stooped to raise her from the dust, to set her upon a pinnacle of honor, and gratefully and gladly will she acknowledge the hand that did it. "For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden." And how high had he exalted her! The angel had called her blessed at Nazareth. Elizabeth, in the city of Judah, had repeated his saying; but Mary herself rises to the full conception and full acknowledgment of the honor the Lord had put upon her: "For behold," she says, "from henceforth, all generations shall call me blessed." But it fills her with no pride, it

prompts to no undue familiarity with God, or with his great name. She knows to whom to attribute this and every other gift and grace, and in the fullness of a devout and grateful reverence, she adds : "He that is mighty hath done to me great things ; and holy is his name."

So much about herself and all that the Lord had done for her ; but now she widens the embrace of her thanksgiving and praise, and losing all sense of her individuality, her virgin lips are touched with fire, and as poetess and prophetess of the infant church she pours forth the first triumphal song which portrays the general character of the gospel kingdom then to be ushered in.

In these strains there breathed the spirit at once of the Baptist and of Christ ; of the two children of the two mothers who stood now face to face saluting one another. It is the voice of him who cried in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God : every valley shall be exalted, and every hill shall be made low ; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain ; and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed." It is the voice of him who opened his mouth on the

mountain side of Galilee, and said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek : for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness : for they shall be filled." Do we not recognize the very spirit of the ministries both of John and of Jesus in the words : "He hath showed strength with his arm ; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things ; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy ; as he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever."

II.

THE NATIVITY.*

IT is difficult, perhaps impossible, to decide whether it was before or after her visit to Elizabeth, that Joseph was made acquainted with the condition of his betrothed. It must have thrown him into painful perplexity. He was not prepared at first to put implicit faith in her narrative, but neither was he prepared utterly to discredit it. To put her publicly away by a bill of divorce would have openly stamped her character with shame, and branded her child with infamy. He was unwilling that either of these injuries should be inflicted. To put her away privily would at least so far cover her reputation that the child might still be regarded as his; and this he had generously resolved to do, when the angel of the Lord ap-

* Luke ii. 1-20.

peared to him in a dream, removed all his doubts, and led him to take Mary as his wife. This difficulty overcome, Mary was quietly awaiting at Nazareth the expected birth. But it was not at Nazareth that the Messiah was to be born. An ancient prophecy had already designated another village, not in Galilee, but in Judea, as the destined birthplace. "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah"—so had the prophet Micah spoken 700 years before—"though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." To this village of Bethlehem Mary was to be guided at such a time as should secure the fulfilment of the prophecy.

A singular instrumentality was employed to gain this end. The Roman Empire had now stretched its dominion to its widest limits, its power extending from the Euphrates to the British Islands—from the Northern Ocean to the borders of Ethiopia. Amid the prevalence of universal peace, the Emperor, judging it a fit opportunity to ascertain by accurate statistics the population and resources of the different provinces of his dominions, issued an edict

that a general census of the empire should be taken. It gratified his pride ; it would be useful afterwards for many purposes of government, such as determining the taxes that might be imposed, or the levies that might be drawn from the different provinces. This edict of Augustus came to be executed in Judea. That country was not yet, in the outward form of its government, reduced to the condition of a Roman province ; but Herod, while nominally an independent king, was virtually a Roman subject, and had to obey this as well as the other edicts of the Emperor. In doing so, however, Herod followed the Jewish usage, and issued his instructions that every family should repair forthwith to the seat of its tribe, where its genealogical records were kept. The distinction of inheritance among the Jews had long been lost, but the distinction of families and tribes was still preserved, and Herod grounded upon that distinction the prescribed mode of registration or enrollment. Joseph and Mary, being both of the house and lineage of David, were obliged to repair to Bethlehem.

The manner in which the power of the Roman Empire was thus employed to determine the birthplace of our Lord, naturally invites us

to reflect upon the singular conjunction of outward circumstances, the strange timing of events that then took place. Embracing the whole sphere of reflection which thus opens to our view, let us, before fixing our attention upon the incidents of the particular narrative now before us, dwell for a little on the Divine wisdom that was displayed in fixing upon that particular epoch in the world's history as the one in which Jesus was born, and lived, and died. "When," says the inspired apostle, "the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law." The expression used here, "the fullness of the time," evidently implies not only that there was a set time appointed beforehand of the Father, but that a series of preparatory steps were pre-arranged, the accomplishment of which had, as it were, to be waited for, ere the season best suited for the earthly advent of our Lord arrived. Some peculiar fitness must then have marked the time of Christ's appearance in this world. We are inclined to wonder that his appearance should have been so long delayed. Looking at all the mighty issues that hung suspended on his advent, we are apt at times to be surprised that so many

thousand years should have been suffered to elapse ere the Son of God came down to save us ; and yet, could the whole plan and counsels of the Deity be laid open to our eye, we cannot but believe that as there were the best and weightiest reasons why his coming should be deferred so long, there were also the best and weightiest reasons why it should be deferred no longer. To attempt on either side the statement of these reasons would be to attempt to penetrate within the veil that hides from us the secret things of God. Taking up, however, the history of the world as it is actually before us, it can neither be unsafe nor presumptuous to consider the actual and obvious benefits which have attended the coming of the Saviour at that particular period when it happened.

In the first place, we can readily enough perceive that it has served greatly to enhance the number and the force of the evidences in favor of the Divine origin and authority of his mission. Two of the chief outer pillars upon which the fabric of Christianity as a revelation from Heaven rests, are Prophecy and Miracles. But if Christ had come in the earliest ages ; had the Incarnation followed quickly upon the Fall so far as that coming was concerned, there

had been no room or scope for prophecy—one great branch of the Christian evidences had been cut off. As it now is, when we take up that long line of predictions, extending over more than three thousand years, from the first dim intimation that the Seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent, down to to the last prophecy of Malachi, that the Lord, whom the Jews sought, should come suddenly to his temple as the Messenger of the Covenant, whom they delighted in ; when we mark the growing brightness and fullness that characterizes each succeeding prediction, as feature after feature in the life and character of the great Messiah is added to the picture ; when we compare actual events with the passages in those ancient writings, in which they were repeatedly foretold, what a strong confirmation is given thereby to our faith, that He, of whom all those things had been spoken so long beforehand, was indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God. How much, then, in regard to prophecy, should we have lost, had the interval between the Fall and the Incarnation not been long enough for that wonderful series of prophecies to be interposed.

Even as to the miracles we should have been

put to great and serious disadvantage. Our faith in the reality of these miracles rests upon human testimony. That testimony is embodied in the writings of the apostles and their contemporaries. Those writings were issued at an advanced stage in the history of the world. They have come down to us through the same channel—they come accompanied with the same vouchers for their authenticity—with a vast mass of other ancient writings whose genuineness and credibility no one has ever denied. Our belief in the miracles of Jesus is thus bound up with our belief in a large portion of ancient history, for our knowledge of which we are indebted to writings of equal and greater antiquity than those of the New Testament. If we renounce the one, we must, in all fairness, renounce the other also. We must blot out all that is alleged to have happened in the world from this date upwards. It has been of the greatest possible service in the defence of Christianity against the attack of scholarly men, that the life of Jesus Christ, recorded in the four Gospels, forms part and parcel of so large a portion of the preserved literature of antiquity—written, as it were, with the same ink, published at the same time, pre-

served in the same manner, so that together they must stand or together fall. How should it have stood, if, instead of being as it is, those miracles of Christ had been wrought far back in the world's history ; the record of them written at some period preceding that from which any other authentic narrative had come down to us, some centuries before the date of the first acknowledged book of common history ? Who does not perceive to what exceptions, just or unjust, they would, in consequence, have been exposed ? Who does not perceive that, fixing his eye upon the barbarous and fabulous age in which the record originated, and upon the longer and more perilous passage that it had made, with some show at least of reason, with some apparent ground for the distinction, other ancient histories might have been received, and yet this one rejected ? We have to thank God then for the wisdom of that order of things whereby, in consequence of the particular time at which Christ appeared, our faith in him as the heaven-sent Saviour rests upon the same solid basis with our faith in the best accredited facts of common history.

We can discern another great and beneficial

purpose that was served by the appearance of Christ at so late a period. The world was left for a long while to itself, to make full proof of its capabilities and dispositions. Many great results it realized. There were countries unvisited by any light from heaven, upon which the sun of civilization rose and shone with no mean lustre ; where the intellect of man acted as vigorously as it has ever done on earth ; where all the arts and refinements of life were brought to the highest state of culture ; where taste and imagination revelled amid the choicest objects of gratification ; where, in poetry and in painting, and in sculpture and in architecture, specimens of excellence were furnished which remain to this day the models that we strive to imitate. Was nothing gained by allowing Egypt, Greece, and Rome to run out their full career of civilization, while the light from heaven was confined meanwhile to the narrow limits of Judea ? Was nothing gained by its being made no longer a matter of speculation but a matter of fact, that man may rise in other departments, but in religion will not, left unaided, rise to God ; that he may make great progress in other kinds of knowledge, but make no progress in the knowledge of his

Maker ; that he may exercise his intellect, regale his fancy, refine his taste, correct his manners, but will not, cannot purify his heart? For what was the actual state of matters in those countries unblest by revelation? We have the description drawn by an unerring hand : "They became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things ; who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever." We should have lost that exhibition of the greatest refinement coupled with the grossest idolatry, had the light of Revelation mingled universally from the first with the light of ordinary civilization.

Let us look a little more closely at the condition of Judea relatively to the Roman Empire at the time of our Lord's birth and death. It was owing, as we have already mentioned, to Herod's being nominally a sovereign but virtually a subject, that the order for registration came to be executed in Palestine which forced

Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Is there nothing impressive in seeing the power of Rome thus interposed to determine the Redeemer's birthplace ; the pride and policy of the world's great monarchy employed as an instrument for doing what the hand and counsel of the Lord had determined beforehand to be done ? But even that nominal kingdom which Herod enjoyed soon passed from his family. A few years after the birth of Christ, Archelaus, who reigned in Judea in the room of his father Herod, was deposed and banished. Judea had then a Roman governor placed over it. Still, however, whether through respect to its banished princes, or some latent reverence for its Temple and ancient laws, the old national and priestly authorities were suffered to continue and enjoy some part of their old power and privileges. It was an anomalous and short-lived state of things ; a Jewish law and Jewish officers, under a Roman law and Roman officers : the two fitted into each other by certain limits being assigned to the inferior or Jewish judicatories which they were not permitted to overpass. To no Jewish court, not even to the highest, the Sanhedrim, was the power of inflicting capital punishment intrusted ; and it

was wholly owing to that peculiar and temporary adjustment, that all the formality of an orderly trial, and all the publicity of a legal execution was stamped upon the closing scenes of the Saviour's life. Had Jesus Christ appeared one half-century earlier, or one half-century later than he did; had he appeared when the Jewish authorities had unchecked power, how quickly, how secretly had their deadly malice discharged itself upon his head? No cross had been raised on Calvary. Had he come a few years later, when the Jews were stripped even of that measure of power they for a short season enjoyed, would the Roman authorities, then the only ones in the land, of their own motion have condemned and crucified him? Even as it was, it was impossible to persuade Pilate that Jesus was either a rival whom Cæsar had any reason to fear, or a rebel whom it became him to punish. Why then was the rule over Judea at this time in the hands of Rome? and why was that power induced to treat Judea for a time so differently from her other subject provinces? Why, but that she might be standing there ready, when Christ fell into the hands of his exasperated countrymen, to extricate him from that grasp

under which in darkness he might have perished ; and, though she too denied him justice, yet by her weak and vacillating governor, that hers might be the voice proclaiming aloud his innocence ; hers the hand to erect the cross, and lift it up so high that the eyes of all the nations and all the ages might behold it.

But let us now turn to the narrative of our Redeemer's birth. When Mary was at first informed that Joseph and she must go to Bethlehem, perhaps she shrunk from so long a journey, lingered to the last ere she entered on it, and took it slowly. She was late at least in her arrival at the village. The inn, we may well suppose the single one that so small a place afforded for the entertainment of strangers,* was crowded. She had to take the only accommodation that the place afforded. Adopting here the early tradition of the Church, as reported by Justin Martyr, who was born about a century afterwards, and within fifty

* The inn or khan was frequently in the earliest times the house of the sheik or chief man of the place. A very interesting *résumé* of all the historical notices of the inn or khan of Bethlehem is given in the *Athenæum* for December 26, 1863, which makes it more than probable that the place of Christ's birth was close to, if not within, the very house to which Boaz conducted Ruth, and in which Samuel anointed David king.

miles from Bethlehem, let us say, she had to go into one of the caves or grottos in the rock common in the neighborhood, connected with the inn. There, where the camels and the asses had their stalls ; there, far away from home and friends, among strangers all too busy to care for her ; amid all the rude exposures and confusion of the place, Mary brought forth her first-born son, and when her hour was over, having swathed him with her own weak hands, laid him in a manger.

A very lowly mode of entering upon human life ; nothing whatever to dignify, everything to degrade. Yet the night of that wonderful birth was not to pass by without bearing upon its bosom a bright and signal witness of the greatness of the event. Sloping down from the rocky ridge on which Bethlehem stood, there lay some grassy fields, where all that night long some shepherds watched their flocks ; humble, faithful, industrious men ; men, too, of whom we are persuaded that, Simeon-like, they were waiting for the Consolation of Israel ; who had simpler and more spiritual notions of their Messiah than most of the well-taught scribes of the metropolis. They would not have understood the angel's message so well ;

they would not have believed it so readily ; they would not have hastened so quickly to Bethlehem ; they would not have bent with such reverence over so humble a cradle ; they would not have made known abroad what had been told them concerning this child—made it known as a thing in which they themselves most heartily believed—had they not been devout, believing men. Under the starry heavens, along the lonely hillsides, these shepherds are keeping their watch, thinking perhaps of the time when these very sheepwalks were trodden by the young son of Jesse, or remembering some ancient prophecy that told of the coming of one who was to be David's son and David's Lord. Suddenly the angel of the Lord comes upon them, the glory of the Lord encompasses them with a girdle of light brighter than the mid-day sun could have thrown around them. They fear as they see that form, and as they are encircled by that glory, but their alarm is instantly dispelled. "Fear not," says the angel. "for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour which is Christ the Lord." Mary had been told that her child

was to be called Jesus, that he was to be great, to be son of the Highest, the heir to his father David's throne, the head of an everlasting monarchy. Joseph had been told that he was to call the child born of Mary, Jesus, for he was to save his people from their sins—a simpler and less Jewish description of his office. The angel speaks of him to these shepherds in still broader and sublime terms. Unto them and unto all people this child was to be born, and unto them and unto all he was to be a Saviour, Christ the Lord, the only instance in which the double epithet, Christ the Lord, is given in this form to him. A universal, a divine Messiahship was to be his.

The shepherds ask no sign as Zacharias and Mary had done; yet they got one: "And this," said the angel, "shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." But one such child, born that night, wrapped up in such a way, lying in such a place, could so small a village as Bethlehem supply. That village lay but a mile or so from the spot they stood on; the sign could speedily be verified. But they have something more to see and hear ere their visit to the village is paid. The voice of that

single angel has scarce died away in the silence of the night—lost in wonder they are still gazing on his radiant form—when suddenly a whole multitude of the heavenly host bursts upon their astonished vision, lining the illuminated heavens. Human eyes never saw before or since so large a company of the celestial inhabitants hovering in our earthly skies ; and human ears never heard before or since such a glorious burst of heavenly praise as those angels then poured forth—couching it in Hebrew speech, their native tongue for the time foregone, that these listening shepherds may catch up at once the cradle-hymn that heaven now chants over the new-born Saviour ; that these shepherds may repeat it to the men of their own generation ; that from age to age it may be handed down, and age after age may take it up as supplying the fittest terms in which to celebrate the Redeemer's birth—“Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, goodwill towards men.”

At the moment when these words first saluted human ears, what a contrast did they open up between earth and heaven ! As that babe was born in Bethlehem, this world lay around him in silence, in darkness, in ignorant

unconcern. But all heaven was moved ; for, large as that company of angels was which the shepherds saw, what were they to the thousands that encircle the throne of the Eternal ! And the song of praise the shepherds heard, what was it to the voice, as of many waters, which rose triumphant around that throne ! That little dropping of its praise committed for human use to human keeping, Heaven hastily veiled itself again from human vision. The whole angelic manifestation passed rapidly away. The shepherds are startled in their midnight rounds ; a flood of glory pours upon them ; their eyes are dazzled with those forms of light ; their ears are full of that thrilling song of praise : suddenly the glory is gone ; the shining forms have vanished ; the stars look down as before through the darkness ; they are left to a silent, unspeakable wonder and awe. They soon, however, collect their thoughts, and promptly resolve to go at once into the village. They go in haste ; the sign is verified ; they find Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in the manger. They justify their intrusion by telling all that they had just seen and heard ; and amid the sorrows and humiliations of that night, how cheering to Mary the

strange tidings that they bring! Having told these, they bend with rude yet holy reverence over the place where the infant Saviour lies, and go their way to finish their night-watch among the hills, and then for all their life long afterwards to repeat to wondering listeners the story of that birth. With those shepherds let us bend for a moment or two over the place where the infant Redeemer lay, to meditate on one or two of the lessons which it is fitted to suggest.

By the manner of his entrance into this world, Christ hath dignified the estate of infancy, has hallowed the bond which binds the mother to her new-born child. He, the great Son of God, stooped to assume our humanity. He might have done so at once; taken it on him in its manhood form. The second Adam might have stood forth like the first, no childhood passed through. Why did he become an infant before he was a man? Was it not, among other reasons which may suggest themselves, that he might consecrate that first of human ties, that earliest estate of human life? The grave, we say, has been hallowed,—has not the cradle also,—by Christ's having lain in it?

By the humiliation of his birth, he stripped

the estate of poverty of all reproach. Of all who have ever been born into this world, he was the only one with whom it was a matter of choice in what condition he should appear. The difference, indeed, between our highest and our lowest,—between a chamber in a palace, and a manger in a stable,—could have been but slight to him ; yet he chose to be born in the stable, and to be laid in the manger. And that first stage of his earthly life was in keeping with all that followed. For thirty years he depended on his own or others' labor for his daily bread : for three years more, he was a houseless, homeless man, with no provision but that which the generosity of others supplied : “The foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests ; but he had not where to lay his head.” And has not that life of his redeemed poverty from all disgrace ; has it not lifted it to honor ?

As we bend in wonder over the infant Saviour, we learn the difference between the inferior and higher forms of an earthly greatness. On that night when Christ was born, what a difference was there in all outward marks of distinction, between that child of the Hebrew mother as he lay in his lowly cradle, and the

Augustus Cæsar whose edict brought Mary to Bethlehem, as he reposed in his imperial palace! And throughout the lifetimes of the two there was but little to lessen that distinction. The name of the one was known and honored over the whole civilized globe: the name of the other scarce heard of beyond the narrow bounds of Judea. And when repeated there, it was too often as a byword and a reproach. How stands it now? The throne of the Cæsars, the throne of mere human authority and power, has perished. That name, at which nations trembled, carries no power over the spirits of men. But the empire of Jesus, the empire of pure, undying, self-sacrificing love, will never perish; its sway over the conscience and hearts of men, as the world grows older becomes ever wider and stronger. His name shall be honored while sun and moon endure;—men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed. This world owes an infinite debt to him, were it for nothing else than this, that he has so exalted the spiritual above the material; the empire of love above the empire of power.

Again we bend over this infant as he lies in that manger at Bethlehem, and as we do so,

strange scenes in his after life rise upon our memory. Those little, tender feet, unable to sustain the infant frame, are yet to tread upon the roughened waters of a stormy lake, as men tread the solid earth! At the touch of that little, feeble hand, the blind eye is to open, and the tied tongue to be unloosed, and diseases of all kinds are to take wings and flee away! That soft, weak voice, whose gentle breathings in his infant slumbers can scarce be heard, is to speak to the winds and the waves, and they shall obey it; is to summon the dead from the sepulchre, and they shall come forth! Who then, and what was he, whose birth the angels celebrated in such high strains? None other than he of whom Isaiah, anticipating the angels, had declared: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." It was He, the Word, who was from the beginning with God, and who was God; who was thus made flesh, and came to dwell among us. This is, in truth, the central fact or doctrine of our religion; the mystery of mysteries; the one great miracle of divine, everlasting love.

Admit it, and all the other wonders of the Saviour's life become not only easy of belief,—they appear but the natural and suitable incidents of such a history as his. Deny it, and the whole gospel narrative becomes an inexplicable enigma. The very heart of its meaning taken out of it, you may try to turn it into a myth or fable if you please; but a credible story it no longer is. No; not credible even in that part of it into which nothing of the supernatural enters. Christ was either what he claimed to be, and what all those miraculous attestations conspire to establish that he was; he was either one with the Father, knowing the Father as the Father knew him, doing whatever the Father did,—so direct and full a revelation of the Father that it could be truly said that he who had seen him had seen the Father likewise;—or his character for simplicity and honesty and truthfulness stands impeached, and the whole fabric of Christianity is overturned.

Let those angels teach us in what light we should regard the birth of Christ, the advent of the Redeemer. They counted it as glad tidings of great joy that they gave forth when they announced that birth; they broke forth together in exulting praises over it, as glorify-

ing to God in the highest, as proclaiming peace on earth, as indicating good-will toward men. In that good-will of God to us in Christ let us heartily believe ; into that peace with God secured to us in Christ let us humbly yet gratefully enter. Those glad tidings of great joy let us so receive as that they shall make us joyful, that so Christ may be glorified in us on earth, and we be glorified with him throughout eternity !

III.

THE PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE.*

ON the eighth day after his birth Christ was circumcised ; the visible token of his being one of the seed of Abraham according to the flesh was thus imposed. In his case, indeed, this rite could not have that typical or spiritual meaning which in all other cases it bore. It could point to no spiritual defilement needing to be removed. But though on that ground exemption might have been claimed for him, on other grounds it became him in this as in other respects to fulfill the requirements of the Jewish law. From the earliest period, from the first institution of the rite, it had been the Jewish custom to give its name to the child on the occasion of its circumcision, as it is the Christian custom, borrowed from the Jewish, to give its name to the child on the occasion of its baptism. The angel indeed,

* Luke ii. 21-28.

who had appeared to Zacharias, and to Mary, had in each instance announced beforehand what the names of the two children were to be. These however were not formally imposed till the day of their circumcision. In the Baptist's case there was a large assemblage of relations and friends upon that day ; and springing out of the peculiar condition of the father, the naming of John was attended with such striking circumstances, that the fame of them was noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judea. At Bethlehem Joseph and Mary were too far away from all their kindred to call any assemblage of them together. In their humbler position they might not have done it, even had they been resident at the time in Nazareth. Quietly, privately, obscurely they circumcised their child and gave to him the name of *Jesus*, that name so rich in meaning, so full of promise.

Forty days after the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary carried the infant up to Jerusalem. There was a double object in this visit. Mary had to present the offering which the Jewish law required at the hands of every mother when the days of her purification were accomplished. This offering, in the case of all whose

circumstances enabled them to present it, was to consist of a lamb of the first year for a burnt-offering, and a young pigeon or a turtle-dove for a sin offering. With that consideration for the poor which marks so many of the Mosaic ordinances, it was provided that if the mother were not able to furnish a lamb, a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons were to be accepted, the one for the burnt-offering, and the other for the sin-offering. That such was the offering which Joseph and Mary presented to the priest, carried with it an unmistakable evidence of the poverty of their estate. Besides discharging this duty, Mary had at the same time to dedicate her infant son as being a first-born child to the Lord, and to pay the small sum fixed as the price of his redemption.

There were few more common, few less noticeable sights than the one witnessed that forenoon within the Temple when Christ's presentation as a first-born child took place. It happened every day that mothers brought their children to be in this way dedicated and redeemed. It was part of the daily routine work of the priest-in-waiting to take their payments, to hold up the children before the altar to enroll their names in the register of the first-

born, and so to complete the dedication ; a work which from its commonness he went through without giving much attention either to parents or to child, unless indeed there was something special in their rank, or their appearance or their offerings. But here there was nothing of this kind. A poor man and woman, in humblest guise, with humblest offerings, present themselves before him. The woman holds out her first-born babe : he takes, presents, enrolls, and hands it back to her ; all seems over, and what is there in so common, plain, and simple an old Jewish custom worthy of any particular notice ? We shall be able to answer that question better, by considering for a moment what this rite of the dedication of the first-born among the Israelites really meant, especially as applied to this first-born, to this child Jesus.

When Moses first got his commission from the Lord in Midian, and was told to go and work out the great deliverance of his people from their Egyptian bondage, the last instruction he received was this : “ And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my first-born. And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me ;

and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy first-born" (Exodus iv. 22, 23). As a mother reclaims her infant from the hands of a cruel nurse, as a father reclaims his son from the hands of a severe and capricious schoolmaster, so the Lord reclaimed his son, his first-born Israel, from the hands of Pharaoh. But the king's haughty answer to the demand was: "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go?" Sign after sign was shown, wonder after wonder wrought, woe after woe inflicted, but the spirit of the proud king remained unbroken. At last, all lesser instruments having failed, the sword was put into the hands of the destroying angel, and he was sent forth to execute that foretold doom, which—meant to strike at the very heart of the entire community of Egypt—fell actually only upon the first-born in every family. The nation was taken as represented by these its first and best. In their simultaneous death on that terrible night, Egypt throughout all its borders was smitten. But the first-born of Israel was saved, and through them, as representatives of the whole body of the people, all Israel was saved; saved, yet not without blood, not without the sacrifice of the

lamb, for every household had the sprinkling of its shed blood upon the lintel and door-post. It was to preserve and perpetuate the memory of this judgment and this mercy, this smiting and this shielding, this doom and this deliverance, that the Lord spake unto Moses saying, "Sanctify unto me all the first-born, both of man and beast ; it is mine : for on the day that I smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt, I hallowed unto me all the first-born in Israel ; mine they shall be ; I am the Lord. And it shall be, when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this ? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the Lord brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage : and it came to pass when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the Lord slew all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both the first-born of man and the first-born of beast, therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all that openeth the matrix, being males ; but all the first-born of my children I redeem."* During the earlier and simpler patriarchal economy, the first-born in every family was also its priest. Had that rule been followed when the twelve tribes were organized into the Theocracy, the

* Exod. xiii. 1 ; Numb. iii. 13 ; Exod. xiii. 14, 15.

first-born invested with a double sacredness as peculiarly the redeemed of the Lord, would have been consecrated to the office of the priesthood. Instead of this, the tribe of Levi was set apart, that it might supply all the priests required for the services of the sanctuary; and the first-born for whom they were thus substituted were redeemed or released from that service by the payment, each, on the day of their presentation in the Temple, of a merely nominal gratuity; by that payment, the original right and title, as it were, of the first-born to the office of the priesthood being still preserved.

This rite, then, of the presentation of the first-born in the Temple, had a double character and office. It was a standing memorial or remembrancer of a past fact in the history of the Jewish people,—the deliverance of their forefathers from the bondage of Egypt, and especially of the shielding of their first-born from the stroke which fell on all the first-born of the Egyptians: but the deliverance from Egyptian bondage was itself a type and prophecy of another higher and wider deliverance, and especially of the manner in which that deliverance was to be wrought out.

In the light of this explanation, let us look yet once again at our Lord's presentation in the Temple as a first-born child, and see whether—as the eye of faith looks through the outward actions to that which the actions symbolize, looks through the outward form and discerns the spiritual significance—the whole scene does not become, as it were, transfigured before us. You mount the steps, and come up into this Temple at Jerusalem. It is neither a feast-day nor a Sabbath-day, nor is it the fixed hour for prayer. A few priests, or Levites, or other hangers-on of the Holy Place, are loitering in the outer courts. A man and woman in Galilean dress, the woman bearing an infant in her arms, cross the court and go forward to where the priest is standing, whose duty it is to present whatever individual sacrifices or oblations may that day be offered. They tell the priest their errand, hand to him or to one of his attendants, the two young turtle-doves, and the five shekels of the Sanctuary. He, in his turn, goes through with his part of the prescribed ceremonial, and gives the child back again to his parents as a first-born child that had been duly devoted to the Lord. The father, the mother, the priest, whatever

onlookers there are, all imagine, that nothing more has been done in all this than is so often done when first-born children are consecrated. But was it so? Who is this child that lies so passive on its mother's breast, and, all unconscious of what is being done with him, is handled by the officiating priest? He is, as his birth had proclaimed him to be, one of the seed of Abraham, and yet he afterwards said of himself, "Before Abraham was, I am." He is, as the angel had proclaimed him to be, David's son and David's heir; but as he said afterwards of himself, the root as well as the branch of David: David's Lord as well as David's son. He is the first-born of Mary, but he is also the first-born of every creature, the beginning of the creation of God. He is the infant of a few weeks old, but also the Ancient of Days, whose goings forth were from of old, from everlasting. Here then at last is the Lord, the Jehovah, whom so many of the Jews were seeking, brought suddenly, almost, as one might say, unconsciously into his own Temple. Here is the Lamb of God, of old provided, now publicly designated and set apart,—of which the paschal one, the sight of whose blood warded off the stroke of the destroying angel, was but

the imperfect type. Here is the one and only true High Priest over the house of God, consecrated to his office, of whose all-prevailing, everlasting, and unchangeable priesthood, the Aaronic priesthood, the priesthood of the first-born, was but the dim shadow. Here is the Son presented to the Father, within the Holy Place on earth, as he enters upon that life of service, suffering, sacrifice, the glorious issue of which was to be his entering not by the blood of bulls and goats, but by his own blood, into that Holy Place not made with hands, having obtained eternal redemption for us, there for ever to present himself before the Father, as the living head of the great community of the redeemed, the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven. X

How little did that Jewish priest, who took the infant Saviour and held him up before the altar, imagine that a greater than Moses, one greater than the Temple, was in his arms! How little did he imagine as he inscribed the new name of Jesus in the roll of the first-born of Israel, that he was signing the death-warrant of the Mosaic economy now waxing old and ready to vanish away; that he was ushering in that better, brighter day, when neither of

the Temple upon Mount Zion, nor of that upon Gerizim, it should be said that there only was the true worship of Jehovah celebrated ; but when, taught by this very Jesus to know God as Our Father in Heaven, unfettered and redeemed humanity in every land should worship him who is a Spirit in spirit and in truth. Yet even so it was ; Christ's first entrance into the Temple, his dedication there unto the Lord, was no such common ceremonial as we might fancy it to be. Simple in form, there lay in it a depth and sublimity of meaning. It was nothing else than the first formal earthly presentation to the Father of the incarnate Son of God, his first formal earthly dedication to that great work given him to do. And was it not meet when the Father and the Son were brought visibly together in this relationship, that the presence of the Holy Spirit should be manifested ; that by that Spirit Simeon and Anna should be called in, and by that Spirit their lips should be made to speak the infant Saviour's praise ; that so within the Temple, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit might all appear, dignifying with their presence our Lord's first entrance into the Holy Place ; his consecration to his earthly mediatorial work ?

Two fitter channels through which the Spirit's testimony might thus be given could scarcely have been chosen. Simeon and Anna both belonged to that limited number, who in the midst of all the crude and carnal conceptions of the Messiah prevalent among their countrymen, were waiting for Christ and longing for his coming, not so much for the temporal as for the spiritual benefits which his coming and kingdom were to convey. Both were well stricken in years, fit representatives of the closing age of Judaism; both were full of faith and hope, fit representatives of that new age whose earliest dawn they were among the first to notice and to welcome.

So ardent as his years ran on had Simeon's faith and hope become, that this one thing had he desired of the Lord, that before his eyes closed in death they might rest upon his Saviour. And he was heard as to that for which he had so longed. It was revealed to him that the desire of his heart should be granted, but how and when he knew not. That forenoon, however, a strong desire to go up into the Temple seizes him. He was not accustomed to go there at that hour, but he obeys that inward impulse, which perhaps he recog-

nized as the work of the Divine Spirit, by whom the gracious revelation had been made to him. He enters the Temple courts; he notices a little family group approach; he sees an infant dedicated to the Lord. That infant, an inward voice proclaims to him is the Messiah he had been waiting for, the Consolation of Israel come at last in the flesh. Then comes into his heart a joy beyond all bounds. It kindles in his radiant looks; it beats in his swelling veins; the strength of youth is back again into his feeble limbs. He hastens up to Mary, takes from the wondering yet consenting mother's hands the consecrated babe, and clasping it to his beating bosom, with eyes uplifted to heaven, he says, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." Joseph and Mary stand lost in wonder. How has this stranger come to see aught uncommon in this child; how come to see in him the salvation of Israel? Have some stray tidings of his birth come into the holy city from the hill country of Judea, or has the wondrous tale the shep-

herds of Bethlehem "made known abroad," been repeated in this old man's hearing? What he says is in curious harmony with all the angel had announced to Mary and to the shepherds about the child, and yet there is a difference; for now, for the first time, is it distinctly declared that this child shall be a light to lighten the Gentiles; nay, his being such a light is placed even before his being the glory of Israel. Has Simeon had a separate revelation made to him from heaven, and is this an independent and fuller testimony borne to the Messiahship of Jesus?

Simeon sees the wonder that shines out in their astonished looks; and, the spirit of prophecy imparted—that spirit which had been mute in Israel since the days of Malachi, but which now, once more, lifts up its voice within the Temple—he goes on, after a gentle blessing bestowed upon both parents, to address himself particularly to Mary, furnishing in his words to her fresh material for wonder, while opening a new future to her eye. "Behold," he said to her, "this child of thine is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel." He may have meant, in saying so, that the purpose and effect of the Lord's showing unto

Israel would be the casting down of many in order to the raising of them up again ; the casting of them down from their earlier, worldlier thoughts and expectations, in order to the lifting them to higher, worthier, more spiritual conceptions of his character and office. Or, perhaps it was to different and not to the same persons that he referred, the truth revealed being this : that while some were to rise, others were to fall ; that the stone which to some was to be a foundation-stone elect and precious, was to others to be a stone of stumbling and rock of offence ; that Jesus was to come for judgment into the world, that those who saw not might see, that those who saw might be made blind ; his name to be the savour of life unto life to the one, the savour of death unto death to the other.

From all Mary had yet heard she might have imagined that her child would be welcomed by all Israel (so soon as the day for his revelation came) as its long-looked for deliverer ; and that a career of unsuffering triumph would lie before him,—a career in whose honors and bliss she could scarcely help at times imagining that she should have a share. But now, for the first time, the indication is clearly given that all Is-

rael was not to hail her child, and welcome him as its Messiah; that hostility was to spring up even within the ranks of the chosen people; that he was to be a "sign which should be spoken against," or rather, for such is the more literal rendering of the words, a butt or mark at which many shafts or javelins should be launched. Nor was Mary herself to escape. Among the many swords or darts levelled at his breast, one was to reach hers: "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also." Strange that in the very centre of so broad and comprehensive a prophecy concerning Christ, such a minute and personal allusion to Mary should come in; a high honor put upon the mother of our Lord that her individual sorrows should be foretold in this way in connexion with the deeper sorrows of her Son; and a singular token of the tender sympathy of Him by whom it was prompted, that now when her heart was filling with strange, bright hopes; now, while her child was yet an infant; now, ere the evil days drew on, when she should have to see him become the object of reproach and persecution, and stand herself to look at him upon that cross of shame and agony on which they hung him up to die,—that now to

temper her first-born joy, to prepare and fortify her for the bitter trials in store for her, this prophecy should have been thus early spoken.

“That the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” No such revealer of the thoughts of men’s hearts has the world ever seen as Jesus Christ. His presence, his character, his ministry, brought out to light the hidden things of many a human spirit. He walked abroad applying upon all sides the infallible test which tried the temper of the soul: “If I had not come,” he said, “they had not had sin, but now they have no cloak for their sin.” In its un-cloaked nakedness he made the sin be seen. “I know you,” said he to the Jews, “that ye have not the love of God in you,” and the reason that he gave for this was, that they had rejected him. Coming into contact with them all in turn, he revealed the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, the worldliness of the young ruler, the faith of the Syro-Phenician woman, the malice of the Sanhedrim, the weaknesses of Pilate, the treachery of Judas, the rashness of Peter, the tender care and sympathy of Mary. Throughout the whole of his earthly life the description given here by Simeon was continually being verified. That description itself

throughout reveals its divine origin and character. It proves itself to have been no bold conjecture of human wisdom, but a revelation of the future made by God.

Simeon's prophetic portraiture of the intention and effect of the advent of the Redeemer had been scarcely completed when another testimony was added ; that of the aged Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, who like her venerable compeer appears but this once in the sacred page, and then is hidden for ever from our eyes. It is not said that any special impulse drew her to the temple. It was her daily haunt. Instantly serving God day and night, her life was one of fastings and prayers. When it was also made known to her that the infant whom she met in the Temple was no other than the Christ of God, her song of praise was added to that of Simeon, but the words of it are lost. It would, we may be assured, be a suitable accompaniment, a fit response to his. He, as may be believed, retired from the Temple to close his eyes in peace, but she was moved to go about and speak of the Lord whom she had found to all that looked for redemption in Jerusalem,—the first preacher of the gospel, the first female evangelist in the holy city.

In the briefest terms let one or two practical reflections be now suggested.

Simeon did not wish to die till he had seen the Lord his Saviour ; as soon as he saw him he was ready and willing to depart. Till our spiritual eyes be opened to see Him who is the way, the truth, and the life, which of us is ready to meet our Maker, is prepared to behold his face in peace? But when once our eyes have seen and our hearts embraced him, which of us should fear to die? Simeon desired to depart. It was not that like Job he wished to die because life had become burdensome. His wish to depart was not the product of hours of bitter sorrow, but of a moment of exceeding joy. It was not that like Paul he desired to depart in order to be with Christ. It was the fullness of that gratitude which he felt for the great gift of God in allowing him to see Christ in the flesh ; it was the depth of that satisfaction and delight which filled his heart as his arms enfolded Jesus, which, leaving nothing more, nothing higher that he could hope for in this world, drew forth, as by a natural impulse, the expression, " Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." Though nothing is said

about his age in the evangelical narrative, we may believe that the length of years which he had already reached, making the thought of approaching departure from this world familiar, conspired, if not to beget, yet to give emphasis to this expression of his desire. But it may be well, even though we be not in his exact position, to put to ourselves the question whether any desire or any willingness we have ever had to die was the fruit of hours of earthly disappointments, or of moments of spiritual elation and joy.

Christ was set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel ; he is set for the fall and rising again of many still. His gospel never leaves us as it finds us. It softens or it hardens, it kills or it makes alive. That stone which the Jewish builders rejected, is rejected by many builders still, and yet is the headstone of the corner. Blessed is he who grounds thereon his humble yet undoubting trust. "But many among them," saith the prophet, "shall stumble and fall, and be broken" upon this stone. May our feet be shielded from such a fate !

The sufferings of Mary were linked with the sufferings of her Son. It was his being wounded that wounded her. It was the stroke which

descended on him that sent the sword into her heart. The same kind of tie should bind every believer to Christ. He is so sensitive as to all that affects his people's welfare and happiness, that whatever hurts the least of these his little ones, touches the apple of his eye. And they in turn should be so sensitive as to all that affects his honor, his cause, his kingdom on the earth, that whatever damages or injures them should send a thrill of answering sorrow through their heart.

Finally, Christ is the great Revealer of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Are we proud, are we covetous, are we worldly, are we self-willed? Nothing will more bring out the sway and empire of these or any kindred passions over us, than the bringing closer home to us the holy character and unmitigable claims of Jesus Christ. Keep them at a distance, and the strong man armed keeps the palace of the soul, and all comparatively is at peace. Bring them near, force them home upon the conscience and the heart; then it is that the inward struggle begins, and in that struggle the spirit unconsciously revealeth its true condition before God.

IV.

THE VISIT OF THE MAGI.* —

THREE striking incidents marked the birth and infancy of our Lord ; *first*, the midnight appearance of the angelic host to the shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem, and their visit to the village in which the great birth had that night occurred ; *second*, the presentation of Jesus as a first-born child in the Temple, and the testimony there given to him in the prophetic utterances of Simeon and Anna ; and *third*, the visit of the wise men from the East, and the worship and offerings which they presented to the new-born child. Each of these had its special wonders ; in each a supernatural attestation to the greatness of the event was given ; and woven together, they form the wreath of heavenly glory hung by the

* Matthew ii. 1-12.

divine hand around the infancy of the son of Mary.

It is impossible to determine the date of the visit of the wise men. It must have occurred not long after the birth, while Joseph and Mary still lingered in Bethlehem, and it is of little moment whether we place it before or after the presentation in the Temple at Jerusalem. The epithet by which Matthew describes to us these Eastern strangers is not so vague and indefinite as it seems in our translation. He calls them Magi from the East. The birthplace and natural home of the magian worship was in Persia. And there the Magi had a place and power such as the Chaldæans had in Babylon, the Hierophants in Egypt, the Druids in Gaul, and the Brahmins still have in India. They formed a tribe or caste, priestly in office, princely in rank. They were the depositaries of nearly all the knowledge or science existing in the country where they lived ; they were the first professors and practisers of astrology, worshippers of the sun and the other heavenly bodies, from whose appearance and movements they drew their divination as to earthly events—all illustrious births below, being indicated, as they deemed, by certain peculiar

conjunctions of the stars above. Both as priests and diviners they had great power. They formed in fact the most influential section of the community. In political affairs their influence was predominant. The education of royalty was in their hands ; they filled all the chief offices of state ; they constituted the supreme counsel of the realm. As originally applied to this Median priest-caste, the term Magi was one of dignity and honor. Afterwards, when transferred to other countries, and employed to designate not that peculiar sacerdotal order, but all persons of whatever description who were professors of astrology and practisers of divination, as these astrologers and diviners sunk in character, and had recourse to all kinds of mean imposture, the name of magian or magician was turned into one of dishonor and reproach. There seems no reason, however, to doubt that it was in its earlier and honorable meaning that it is used in the Gospel narrative.

Remarkable passages, both from Roman and Jewish writers,* have been quoted which inform us that at the period of our Saviour's birth

* Suetonius, Tacitus, Josephus.

there prevailed generally over the East, in regions remote from Palestine, a vague but strong belief that one born in Judea was to arise and rule the world. Popularly this expectation was confined to the appearance of some warrior chief who, by the might of his victorious arms, was to subdue the nations under him. But there were many then in every land, whose faith in their old hereditary religions had been undermined ; who, from those Jews now scattered everywhere abroad, had learned some of the chief elements of the pure Israelitish faith ; and half embracing it, had risen to a desire and hope which took a higher ground, and who, in this expected king that was to spring out of Judah, were ready to hail a spiritual guide and deliverer. Such, we believe, were the Magi of Matthew's narrative. Balaam, a man of their own or a kindred tribe, in their own or in a neighboring country, had centuries before foretold that a star should come out of Jacob, and a sceptre rise out of Israel (Numb. xxiv. 17.) This and other of those old Jewish prophecies which pointed to the same event may have in some form or other reached their ears, preparing them for the birth of one who in the first instance was

to be the king of the Jews, but whose kingdom was to connect itself with other than mere earthly interests, to have intimate relationships with man's highest hopes and his eternal destiny. Sharing the general hope, but with that hope purified and exalted, let us believe that these Magi were earnestly, devoutly, waiting the coming of this new king of the Jews and of mankind. Their office and occupation led them to the nightly study of the starry heavens; but still as they gazed and speculated and divined, they felt that it was not from that glittering broad-spread page of wonders hung above their heads that any clear or satisfying information as to the divine character and purposes was to be derived. Much as they fancied they could glean from them as to man's earthly fortunes, what could the bright mute stars tell them of the eternal destinies of those unnumbered human spirits which beneath their light were, generation after generation, passing away into the world beyond the grave? How often may the deep sigh of disappointment have risen from the depths of these men's hearts, as to all their earnest interrogatories not a word of distinct response was given, and the heavens they gazed on kept the untold

secret locked in their capacious bosom. But the sigh of the earnest seeker after truth, like the sigh of the lowly, penitent, and contrite heart, never rises to the throne of heaven in vain. Many errors may have mingled with those men's religious opinions, much superstition have been in their religious worship, but God met in mercy the truth-seeking spirit in the midst of its errors, and made its very superstition pave the way to faith.

One night, as those Magi stood watching their cloudless skies, their practised eye detected a new-come stranger among the stars. The appearance of new stars is no novelty to the astronomer. We have authentic records of stars of first magnitude, rivalling in their brilliance the brightest of our old familiar planets, shining out suddenly in places where no star had been seen before, and after a season vanishing away. Singular conjunctions of the planets have also been occasionally observed, some of which are known to have occurred about the time of the Redeemer's birth. It may possibly have been some such strange appearance in the heavens that attracted the eyes of the wise men. It is said, however, in the narrative, that the star went before them till

it came and stood over where the young child was. Understanding this as implying an actual and visible movement of the star—that it went, lantern-like, before them on their way, and indicated in some way, as by a finger of pointing light, the very spot where they were to find the child—as no such function could be discharged by any of the ordinary inhabitants of the heavens, all about its appearance must be taken as supernatural, and we must regard it as some star-like meteor shining in our lower atmosphere. But be it what it might, however kindled, whatever curiosity its strange appearance might excite,—though the Magi, penetrated by the popular belief, might naturally enough have regarded it as an omen of the great expected birth,—the star could of itself tell nothing. However miraculous its appearance, if left without an interpreter, it was but a dumb witness after all. The conviction is almost forced upon us that, in addition to the external sign, there was some divine communication made to these Magi, informing them of the errand which the star was commissioned to discharge. But why the double indication of the birth,—the star without, the revelation made within? Why, but as an evidence and

illustration of the care and gracious condescension of Him who not only to the spiritual communication added the external sign, to be a help to the weak, infant, staggering faith, but who, in the very shaping of that outward sign, was pleased to accommodate himself to these men's earthly calling ; and while to Mary and to the shepherds—Jews living in a land where stories of angelic manifestations were current—angels were sent to make announcement of the Redeemer's birth, to those astrologers of the East he sends a star, meeting them in their own familiar walks, showing itself among the divinities of their erring worship, gently to lead them into His presence to whom the world's true worship was to be given.

But when this star appeared, and after they understood what its presence betokened, was it a spontaneous impulse on their part to go and do homage to the new-born King, or did He who revealed the birth enjoin the journey? Whatever the prompting—human or divine—on which they acted, it does not appear that in the first instance anything beyond the general information was communicated, that somewhere in Judea the birth had taken place. The star, it would appear, did not go before them .

all the way, for in that case they would not have needed to institute any further inquiry. Its first office discharged, the star disappeared, leaving them to have recourse to such common sources of information as lay open to them. It was at Jerusalem, in the capital of the country over which this new-born King was to reign ; it was there, if anywhere, the needed intelligence was to be obtained. To Jerusalem, therefore, they repair. Entering the holy city, they put eagerly and expectantly the question, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

The question takes the startled city by surprise. No one here has seen the star, no one here has heard about this king. The tidings of the arrival of those distinguished strangers, and of the question which they asked, are carried quickly to the palace, and circulate rapidly through the city. Herod is troubled. The usurper trembles on his throne. Has a new claimant, with better title to that throne, indeed been born? How comes it, if it be so, that he has never heard of such a birth? Has treachery been already busy at its work ; have they been concealing from him this event? Have

the enemies of himself and of his family been cloaking thus their projects, waiting only for the fit time to strike the blow, and hurl him from his seat? The blood he had already shed to reach that height begins to cry for vengeance, and spectres of the slaughtered dead shake their terrors in his face. Herod's trouble at the tidings we well can understand, but why was it that all Jerusalem was troubled along with him? Was it the simple fear of change, the terror of another revolution; the knowledge of Herod's jealous temper and blood-thirsty disposition; the alarm lest his vindictive spirit might prompt to some new deed of cruelty, in order to cut off this rival? If so, how low beneath the yoke of tyranny must the spirit of those citizens of Jerusalem have sunk; how completely, for the time, must the selfish have absorbed the patriotic sentiment in their breasts!

But whatever alarm he felt, whatever dark purposes were brooding in his heart, Herod at first concealed them. He must know more about this affair, get some information before he acts. He calls together the chief priests and the scribes, and at no loss, apparently, to identify the King of the Jews that the Magi

asked about, with the Christ the Messiah of ancient prophecy, he demands of them where Christ should be born. As little at a loss, they lay their hand at once upon the prophecy of Micah, which pointed to Bethlehem as the birthplace. Furnished with this information, the king invites the Magi to a private interview, conveys to them the information he had himself received, and concealing his sinister designs, sends them off to Bethlehem to search diligently for the child, and when they had found him, to bring him word again, that he too, as he falsely said, might go and worship him.

Let us pause a moment here to reflect upon the impression which this visit to Jerusalem, and the state of things discovered there, was fitted to make upon these eastern visitors. It must surely have surprised them to come among the very people over whom this new-born King was to rule, to enter the capital of their country, the city of the chief priests and scribes by whom, if by any, an event so signal should have been known, and to find there no notice, no knowledge of the birth ; to find instead, that they, coming from a strange land, professors of another faith, are the first to tell these

Jews of the advent of their own king. It must have done more than surprise them ; they too, in their turn, must have been troubled and perplexed, to see how the announcement, when it was made, was received ; to see such jealousy, such alarm ; and, at the last, so great incredulity or indifférence, that near as Bethlehem was, and interesting as was the object of their visit to it, there were none among those inhabitants of Jerusalem who cared to accompany them. Was there nothing here to awaken doubt, for such faith as theirs to stagger at ? Might they not have been deceived ? Perhaps it was a delusion they had listened to ; a deceitful appearance they had seen in their own land. Had these Magi been men of a weak faith or an infirm purpose, they might, instead of going on to Bethlehem, have gone forth despondingly and distrustfully from Jerusalem, and taken their way back to their own homes.

But strange and perplexing as all this is, it neither shakes their faith nor affects their conduct. They had good reason to believe that the communication at first made to them came to them from God, and once satisfied of this, no conduct on the part of others, however

unaccountable or inconsistent, moves them away from the beginning of their confidence. Though all the dwellers in Jerusalem be troubled at tidings which should have been to them tidings of great joy ; though not a Jew be ready to join them, or to bid them God-speed ere they leave the city's gate, to Bethlehem they go.

But a new perplexity arises. Somewhere in that village the birth has taken place, but who shall tell them where? If the inhabitants of the capital knew and cared so little about the matter, what help will they get from the villagers at Bethlehem? They may require to search diligently, as Herod bade them, and yet, after all, the search may be vain. Just then, in the midst of their perplexity, the star which they had seen in the east once more shone out above their heads to go before them till it stood over where the young child lay. No wonder that when they saw that star, they rejoiced with an exceeding great joy. It dispelled all doubt, it relieved from all perplexity. When first they saw it in the east, it wore the face of a stranger among old friends ; now it wears the face of an old friend among strangers, and they hail it as we hail a friend we

thought was lost, but who comes to us at the very time we need him most.

Let us note the contrast, as to the mode and measure of divine guidance given, between the Magi from the East, and the shepherds of Bethlehem and the Chief Priests and Scribes of Jerusalem. The shepherds were as sincere, perhaps more devout than the wise men ; understanding better who and what the Messiah was to be, and longing more ardently for his coming ; but they were uneducated men, men at least whose position and occupation prevented them from instituting independent inquiries of their own. They were left to find out nothing : to them a full revelation was at once given. Such minute information was furnished as to the time and place and circumstances of the birth, that they were enabled, with little or no inquiry, to proceed directly to the place where the young child lay. The Magi, on the other hand, were men of intelligence, education, wealth. They had the leisure, and they possessed all the means for prosecuting an independent research. To them no such full and minute directory of conduct was supplied. What they could not learn otherwise than by a divine revelation, was in that way commu-

nicated, but what they could learn by the use of ordinary means, they were left in that way to find out. They repair to, and they exhaust all the common sources of knowledge which lie open to them. They go to Jerusalem as to the likeliest place ; they get there the information as to the place of the Lord's birth ; they act upon the information thus obtained up to the furthest limit to which it can carry them. They tarry not in the unbelieving city, as many might have done, till further light was given them. They turn not the incredulity of others into a ground of doubt, nor the incompleteness of the intelligence afforded into a ground of discouragement and delay. They know now that somewhere in Bethlehem the object of their search is to be found, and if they fail in finding him, it will be in Bethlehem that the failure shall take place. Nor is it till they are on their way to that village, that the star of heavenly guidance once more appears ; but then it does appear, and sends gladness into their hearts.

And have we not all, as followers of the Crucified, another and higher journey to perform ; a journey not to the place of the Saviour's earthly birth, but that of his heavenly

dwelling? And if, on that journey, we act as those men did, God will deal with us as he dealt with them. The path before us may be often hidden in obscurity ; our lights may go out by the way ; we may know as little of what the next stage is to reveal, as those men knew at Jerusalem what awaited them in their path to Bethlehem ; but if, like them, we hold on our course, unmoved by the example of others ; if we follow the light given us to the farthest point to which that light can carry us, then on us too, when lights all fail, and we seem about to be left in utter darkness, some star of heavenly guidance will arise, at sight of which we shall rejoice with an exceeding joy. Unto those that are thus upright, there shall arise light in the darkness ; and to him that ordereth thus his conversation aright, God shall show his salvation.

But look, now, at the Chief Priests and Scribes of the holy city, into whose hands the ancient oracles of God had been specially committed. They could tell at once, from the prophecies of Micah, the place of the Messiah's birth ; and they could almost as readily and as accurately from the prophecies of Daniel have known the time of his advent. To them, as

furnished already with sufficient means of information, no supernatural communication of any kind is made ; to them no angel comes ; no star appears, no sign is given. Had they but used aright the means already in their hands, they should have been waiting for the coming of the Lord, with ears all open to catch the first faint rumors, which must have reached Jerusalem from a village not more than six miles off, of what the shepherds saw and heard ; they should have been out to Bethlehem before these Magi came, ready to welcome those visitors from a far country, and to conduct them into the presence of their new-born King. But they neglected, they abused the privileges they possessed ; and now, as the proper fruit of their own doings, not only is the same kind of information supplied to others denied to them, but the very way in which they are first informed works disastrously, and excites hostile prejudices in their breast. “Where is he,” these strangers say to them, “who is born King of the Jews ?” Has an event like this occurred—occurred within a few miles of the metropolis—and they, the heads and rulers of the Jewish people, not know of it ! For their first knowledge of it must they be indebted to these for-

eigners, men ignorant of Judea, unread in their sacred books! A star, forsooth, these men said had appeared to them in the East; was it to be believed that for them in their land of heathen darkness and superstition such a fresh light should be kindled in the heavens, whilst to God's own appointed priesthood, no discovery of any kind had been made! We discern thus in its very earliest stage, that antipathy to the son of Mary which, beginning in incredulity, and fostered by pride, grew into malignant hatred, and issued in the nailing of Jesus to the cross. And even in the first stages of the course they followed, they appear before us, reaping the fruit of their former doings, and sowing the seeds of their after crimes; for it is thus that the husbandry of wickedness goes on,—the seed-time and the harvest, the sowing and the reaping going on together. What a singular spectacle does the proud and jealous priesthood of Judea thus present, learned in the letter of their own Scriptures but wholly ignorant of their spirit; pointing the way to others, not taking a single step in it themselves; types of the nation they belonged to, of the function which the Jews have so largely since discharged—the openers of the door to Gentile

inquirers, the closers of that door upon themselves.

We rejoin now the Magi at Bethlehem. They enter the indicated house, and stand before a mother and her child: a mother of very humble appearance; a child clad in simplest attire. Can this, they think, as they look around, be the roof beneath which infant royalty lies cradled! Can that be the child they have come so far to see and worship! Had they known all about that infant which we now know; had they known that an angelic choir had already sung his birth, lading the midnight breezes with a richer freight of melody than they had ever wafted through the skies; had they known that in that little hand which lay folded there in feebleness, in the gentle breath which was heaving that infant bosom, the power of omnipotence lay slumbering,—that at the touch of the one, the blind eye was to open and the tied tongue to be unloosed,—that at the bidding of the other, the wildest elements of nature in their stormiest march were to stand still, devils were to be driven out from their usurped abodes, and the dead to come forth from the sepulchre; had they known that at the death of this Son of

Mary, the sun was to be darkened, the rocks were to be rent, and the graves to give up their old inhabitants,—that he himself was to burst the barriers of the tomb, and rise in triumph, attended by angel escort, to take his place at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens,—we should not have wondered at the ready homage which they rendered to him. But they knew nothing of all this. What they did know we cannot tell. We only know that instantly, in absence of all outward warrant for the act, in spite of the most unpromising appearances, they bow the knee before that undistinguished infant, lower than it bent before the haughty Herod at Jerusalem ; bow in adoration such as they never rendered to any earthly sovereign. And that act of worship over, they open their treasures and present to him their gifts : the gold, the frankincense, and the myrrh, the rarest products of the East ; an offering such as any monarch might have had presented to him by the ambassadors from any foreign prince. When we take the whole course of these men's conduct into account ; when we remember that they had none of the advantages of a Jewish birth or education, of an early acquaintance with the Jewish Scriptures ;

when we think of their starting on their long and perilous journey with no other object than the making of this single obeisance to the infant Redeemer of mankind ; when we look at them standing unmoved, amid all the discouragements of the Jewish metropolis ; when we attend them on their solitary way to Bethlehem ; when we stand by their side, as beneath that lowly roof they silently worship, and spread out their costly gifts,—we cannot but regard their faith as in many of its features unparalleled in the gospel narrative ; we cannot but place them in the front rank of that goodly company in whose acts the power and the triumph of a simple faith shine forth.

That single act of homage rendered, they return to their own country, and we hear of them no more. They come like spirits casting no shadow before them ; and like spirits they depart, passing away into that obscurity from which they had emerged. But our affection follows them to their native land,—would fain penetrate the secret of their after lives and deaths. Did these men see, and hear, and know no more of Jesus ? Were they living, when—after thirty years of profoundest silence, not a rumor of his name going anywhere abroad—

tidings came at last of the words he spake, the deeds he did, the death he died? We would fain believe, so far, the quaint old legend of the middle ages, that connects itself with the fancied resting-place of their relics in the Cathedral of Cologne; we would fain believe that they lived to converse with one of the apostles of the Lord, and to receive Christian baptism at his hands. However it may have been, we can scarce believe that He whose star carried them from their eastern homes to Bethlehem, and whose Spirit prompted the worship they then rendered, left them to die in heathen ignorance and unbelief. Let us cherish rather the belief that they who bowed so reverently before the earthly cradle, are now worshipping with a profounder reverence before the heavenly throne.

But what special significance has this incident in the early life of our Redeemer? Why were these men summoned from their distant homes to come so far, to pay that single act of homage to the infant Jesus, and then retire forever from our sight? Why, but that even with the first weak beginnings of the Saviour's earthly life, there might be a foretokening of the wide embrace of that kingdom he came to establish ;

a first fulfilling of those ancient prophecies which had foretold that the Gentiles should come to this light, and kings to the brightness of its rising; that all they from Sheba should come, bringing gold and incense. These eastern Magi were the earliest ambassadors from heathen lands, the first shadowy precursors of that great company to be gathered in from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, to sit down with Abraham in the kingdom of the just. In these persons, and in their act, the Gentile world, of which they formed a part, gave an early welcome to the Redeemer, and hastened to lay its tribute at his feet. They were in fact,—and this should bind them the closer to our hearts,—they were our representatives at Bethlehem, making for us Gentiles the first expression of our faith, the first offer of our allegiance. Let us rightly follow up what they did in our name. First, they worshipped, and then they gave the best and richest things they had. The gold, the frankincense, the myrrh, had been of little worth had the worship of the heart not gone before and sanctified the gift. But the gift most appropriately followed the worship. First, then, let us give ourselves to the Lord,

our heart the first oblation that we proffer ;
for the heart once given, the hand will neither
be empty nor idle, nor will it grudge the richest
thing that it can hold, nor the best service
it can render.

V.

THE MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS, AND THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT.*

THERE are three Herods who appear prominently in the pages of the New Testament. *First*, Herod the Great, the son of a crafty and wealthy Idumean or Edomite, who, during the reign of the last of the Asmonean princes, attained to great political influence in Judea, securing for his eldest son, Phasælus, the governorship of Jerusalem; and for Herod, his younger son, the chief command in Galilee. Phasælus was cut off in one of those political commotions which the raising of a foreign family to such an elevated position engendered, but Herod escaped all the perils to which he was thus exposed, distinguished himself by his

* Matthew ii. 13-23.

address and bravery, showed great political foresight in allying himself closely with the power which he saw was to prevail in Judea as over all other lands, sought and won the personal friendship of Cassius and of Mark Antony, and, mainly by the influence of the latter, was proclaimed King of the Jews.)

Second, Herod Antipas, a son of this first Herod, who, in that division of his father's kingdom which took place at his decease, became Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. This was the Herod who so often appears in the narrative of our Lord's ministry, who at first heard John the Baptist gladly, but who afterwards gave the order for his execution; who happened to be in Jerusalem at the time of Christ's trial and condemnation, and who was brought then into such singular contact with Jesus.

Third, Herod Agrippa, a grandson of the first Herod, though not a son of Herod Antipas, who was invested by the Romans with the royal dignity, and ruled over all the country which had been subject to his grandfather. This was the Herod who appears in the history of the Acts of the Apostles; who stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church; who killed James, the brother of John, with

the sword ; who, because he saw that it pleased the Jews, proceeded to take Peter also ; and whose awful death so soon afterwards at Cæsa-rea, St. Luke has so impressively recorded.

Our Saviour, we know, was born near the end of the long reign of the first of these Heróds, and the latest and most successful investigations of the chronology of Christ's life have taught us to believe that it was in the last year of Herod's reign, and close upon that monarch's last illness and death, that the birth at Bethlehem took place. The terrible malady which made his closing scene not less awful than that of his grandson Agrippa, had already begun its work, and given forewarning of the fatal issue. He was in a moody, suspicious, vengeful state of feeling. His reign had long been outwardly brilliant and prosperous. He had defeated all the schemes of his political opponents. With a firm and cruel hand he had kept down all attempts at intestine revolt. By a large remission of taxation, by extraordinary liberality in times of famine, by lavish expenditure on public works, the erection of new cities and the rebuilding of the Temple at Jerusalem, he had sought to dazzle the public eye and win the public favor. But nothing

could quench the Jewish suspicion of him as an Edomite. This suspicion fed upon his attempts to introduce and encourage heathen games and pastimes, and grew intensely bitter as it watched with what unrelenting hate he persecuted and cut off all the members of that Maccabean family whose throne he had usurped, around whom Jewish gratitude and hope still fondly clung. This ill-concealed enmity preyed upon the proud, dark spirit of Herod. It taught him to see his deadliest foes in the bosom of his own family. Passionately attached to her, he had married the beautiful but ill-fated Mariamne, the daughter of Alexander, one of the Asmonean princes. She inherited the pride and ambition of her family; bitterly resenting, as well she might, the secret order which she discovered Herod had issued, that she should be cut off if he failed to secure the throne for himself in the embassy to Rome which he undertook after the defeat of Mark Antony, his first patron. Her resentment of this order had the worst interpretation put upon it, and in the transport of a jealousy in which both personal and political elements were combined, Herod ordered her to be beheaded. Then followed those transports of re-

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morse, which, for a time, bereft the frantic prince of reason. Mariamne gone, the father's jealousy was directed to his two sons by her, in whose veins the hated Asmonean blood was flowing. He sent for Antipater, his son by the wife he had divorced in order to marry Mariamne, and set him up as their rival and his successor. But the popular favor clung to Alexander and Aristobulus, the sons of the murdered Mariamne. Herod's court and family became a constant gloomy scene of dissension and distrust. Charges of treasonable designs on the part of Alexander and Aristobulus against his person and government were secretly poured into the ear of Herod. Men of inferior rank, supposed to be implicated, were seized, tortured, and executed, till at last, by their father's own order, the two young princes, *shaded* then in the flower of their early manhood, were *two no* *strangled* strangled. Antipater had been the chief instrument in urging Herod on to this inhuman deed, and now in that very son whom he had done so much for, he found the last worst object of his jealous wrath. Antipater was proved to have conspired to poison his old, dotting, diseased, and dying father. He was summoned to Jerusalem. Herod raised himself from his

bed of suffering, and gave the order for his execution. His own death drew on. It maddened him to think that there would be none to mourn for him; that at his death there would be a general jubilee. The fiendish idea seized him, that if there were none who voluntarily would weep for him, there should at least be plenty of tears shed at his death; and so his last command—a command happily not executed—was, that the heads of all the chief families in Judea should be assembled in the Hippodrome, and that as soon as it was known that he had drawn his last breath, they should be mercilessly slaughtered; and thus, his body consumed by inward ulcers, and his spirit with tormenting passions, Herod died.

I have recited thus much of this King's history, that you may see in what harmony with his other doings was his massacre of the innocents at Bethlehem. When he heard of the coming of the Magi, and of the birth of this new King of the Jews, the sceptre was already dropping from his aged and trembling hands.* But as the dying hand of avarice clutches its gold the firmer as it feels the hour draw on

* He was seventy years old when he died.

(1) when it must give it up, so did the dying hand of ambition clutch the sceptre, and he determined that if he could hold it no longer, he would at least try to cut off all who might claim to wield it at his death. A lifetime's practice had made him a proficient in craft. He inquired privily of the wise men as to the time at which the star appeared. Had he even then, when he made this inquiry, matured his bloody project ; and did he wish, by knowing the precise time of the star's appearance, to assure himself of the exact age of the child he intended to destroy ; or was the inquiry made for the purpose of ascertaining whether any like star had been seen anywhere in Judea, seeking thus to confirm or invalidate what the wise men said ? This only we can say, that if it were but a few days after the birth of Jesus that the Magi visited Jerusalem, and if the order that Herod afterwards issued to his executioners was founded on the information given him as to the time of the star's appearance, then the first appearance of the star must have been coincident, not with the birth of Jesus, but with the annunciation of that birth to Mary. Herod may have fancied from what he learned from the Magi that the child must now

II be about a year old, and, giving a broad margin, that no chance of escape might be given, his order ran that all under two years of age should be destroyed.

Perhaps, however, Herod's only object in his first private interview with the Magi was to extract from them all the information he could, with no precise or definite purpose as to how he should act upon the information so obtained. When he told them to go and search diligently for the child, and when they had found him, to come and bring him word, it was not with any purpose on his part to go and worship him—in saying that he meant to do so, we may well believe him to have been playing the hypocrite—but neither may it have been with an already fixed resolution to act as he afterwards did. But the wise men did not return; he ascertained that they had been in Bethlehem, that they had left that place, that without coming to see him and report as to the result of their search, they were already beyond his reach on their way back to their distant home. The birth was by this very circumstance made all the surer in his eyes, and to his natural alarm at such a birth, there was now added bitter chagrin at being

mocked in this way by these strangers. Had they seen through the mask which he imagined he had fashioned so artfully and worn so well?

3 Nothing galls the crafty more than when their craft is discovered, and the discovery is turned against themselves. Angry with the men who had treated him thus, Herod is angry, too, with himself for having given them the opportunity to outwit him. Why had he not sent some of his own trusty servants with them to Bethlehem? Why had he been so foolish as to trust these foreigners? Irritated at them, irritated at himself, determined that this child shall not escape, he sends his bandits out upon their bloody errand.

111 That errand was to be quickly and stealthily executed. In so small village as Bethlehem, and in the thinly scattered population which lay around it, there could be but a few male infants under two years old.) It is but one of the dreams of the middle-age imagination which has swelled the numbers of the slaughtered to thousands (H one or two dozens would be nearer to the mark. A few practised hands such as Herod could easily secure would have little difficulty in finishing their work in the course of one forenoon. It was spring-time of

the year ;* the parents were busy in the fields ; the unprotected homes lay open. Before any concerted resistance could be offered, half the children might be slain. Every precaution, we may believe, was taken by Herod, that it should not be known at whose instance the deed was done. He was too wily a politician to make any such public manifestation of his vindictive alarm, as his sending forth a company of executioners, clothed visibly with the royal authority, would have made. But secretly, promptly, vigorously as his measures were taken, they came too late. When told that not a child of the specified age had been permitted to escape, he may have secretly congratulated himself on that peril to his government being thus summarily set aside. But an eye more vigilant than his was watching over the safety of the infant Jesus. In a dream of the night the angel of the Lord had appeared to Joseph ; told him of the impending peril, and specially directed him as to the manner of escape. Without an hour's delay the warning given was acted on. The journey from Bethlehem to the nearest part of Egypt

* It has been accurately ascertained that Herod must have died between the 13th March and the 4th April, 750 A. U. C.

was soon performed, and secured from the stroke of Herod's bandits and placed beyond the after reach of Herod's wrath, the child was safe. The flight was hasty and the sojourn in Egypt was but short.* The way for the return was open, and in fulfillment of his promise the angel came to Joseph to tell him that they were dead who sought the young child's life. Struck by all the circumstances which had accompanied the birth there, Joseph and Mary had perhaps resolved to take up their residence in Bethlehem. But on entering Judea they heard that though Herod was dead, his son Archelaus ruled in his stead; a prince who early proved that the spirit of his father had descended on him, one of the first acts of his reign being the slaughter of three thousand of his countrymen in Jerusalem. The apprehensions of Joseph were verified by the angel once more appearing to him in a dream, and directing him to pass on through Judea, and take up his abode again in Nazareth, a hamlet in the province of Galilee.

* Accepting either the close of the year 749 A. U. C. or the beginning of 750 A. U. C. as the most probable date of the birth of Christ, and assuming that the visit of the Magi succeeded the presentation in the Temple, the stay in Egypt could have been but short

In the narrative of this passage of our Lord's infant life as given by St. Matthew, two things strike us.

- III* 1. The prominent part assigned to, and assumed by Joseph as the earthly guardian of the child ~~at~~ the frequency, the minuteness, and the manner in which these divine intimations were made to him on which he acted. In every instance it was in a dream of the night that the heavenly warning came. Nor was the warning in any instance vague, but remarkably definite and satisfactory. He was told at first not simply that danger was at hand; he was told specifically what that danger was: "Herod will seek the young child to destroy him." He was told not simply to escape from Bethlehem, but to flee into Egypt. ~~of~~ Herod's death he got timely information, and while hesitating as to what he should do on his return into Judea, he had his doubts removed and his fears allayed by another divine direction. Are we wrong in interpreting the heavenly messenger's manner of acting towards the foster-parent of our Saviour as indicative of a very watchful and tender solicitude on Joseph's part for the safety of that strange child to whom he was united by so strange a tie? He appears as the heaven-

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appointed, heaven-instructed sentinel, set to watch over the infant days of the Son of the Highest, chosen for this office, and aided in its discharge, not without such regard to his personal qualifications as is ordinarily shown under the divine government in the selection of fit agents for each part of the earthly work. We are led thus to think of him as taking an almost more than paternal interest in the babe committed to his care, thinking about him so much and so anxiously by day that his dreams by night are of him, and that it is in these dreams the angel comes to give the needed guidance, and to seal, as it were, by the divine approval, the watchful care by which the dreams had been begotten. ✓ And we are the more disposed to think thus favorably of Joseph as we reflect upon the peculiar relationship in which he stood to Jesus, and remember that this is the only glimpse we get of the manner in which the duties of that relationship were discharged. ✓ In the record of our Lord's ministry he never appears. ¶ The conclusion seems natural that he had died before that ministry began. It is only in his connexion with the birth and infancy and childhood of Jesus that any sight of Joseph is obtained, and it pleases us to think

that he who was honored to be the guardian of that sacred life in the first great peril to which it was exposed, was one not unworthy of the trust, but who lovingly, faithfully, tenderly executed it.

2. In reading this portion of the Gospel of St. Matthew, we are struck with the frequent references to the history and prophecies of the Old Testament. Such references are peculiar to St. Matthew, and they are due to the character of those to whom his Gospel was especially addressed, and to the object he had especially in view. His Gospel was written for converted Jews and his great aim was to present to such Jesus Christ as the Messiah promised to their fathers. Continually, therefore, throughout his narrative, as almost nowhere in the narratives of the other Evangelists, he quotes from the Old Testament Scriptures with the view of showing how accurately and completely they were fulfilled in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. The very formula, "that it might be fulfilled," is peculiar to the first Gospel. The method thus followed by St. Matthew was admirably fitted to soothe the prejudices of Jewish converts, and establish them in a true faith in Christ. Thus it is that

in the passage now before us, he attempts to obviate objections that might naturally arise in Jewish minds, on their being told of such events—to them so untoward and unlooked-for—in the life of the infant Messiah as (his being forced to find a temporary retreat in the land of Egypt,² the slaughter of so many infants on his account,³ and the fixing of his abode in a remote hamlet of Galilee. Nothing could be more calculated to allay any prejudice created by the recital of such incidents than to point to parallel or analogous ones in the history of ancient Israel. The three citations of this kind which St. Matthew makes differ somewhat in their character. Of only one of them is it certain that there was a literal fulfillment of a prophecy uttered with immediate and direct reference to Christ. He came and dwelt, it is said, in Nazareth, “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.” Yet it is singular that this prophecy, which was obviously one spoken directly of the Messiah, is nowhere to be found in the Old Testament Scriptures as they now are in our hands. But this hinders not our belief that by some one or other of the ancient prophecies the words that St. Matthew quotes

had been spoken. As Jude recites and verifies a prophecy of Enoch, of which otherwise we should have been ignorant, as St. Paul reports a saying of our Lord which otherwise should not have been preserved, so St. Matthew here records a prophecy which but for his citation of it would have perished.

It is different, however, with the other two citations from ancient prophecy. These we can readily lay our hands upon, and in doing so become convinced that St. Matthew did not and could not mean to assert that in the events which he related they had directly and literally been verified. His object was rather to declare—and that was sufficient—that the incidents to which those old prophecies did in the first instance refer, were not only kindred in character, but were typical or symbolically prophetic of those which he was describing in the life of Jesus. He quotes thus a part of that verse in the 11th chapter of Hosea which runs thus: “When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.” If that ancient Israel of which the Lord had said, ‘He is my son,’ ‘He is my first-born,’ while yet he was as it were but an infant, was carried down into and thereafter brought safe

out of Egypt, was it a strange thing that He who was Jehovah's own and only Son, the first-born among many brethren, of whom and of whose Church that Israel was a type, should in his infancy have passed through a like ordeal of persecution and of deliverance? The point of the fulfillment of the prophecy here alleged does not lie in Hosea's having Christ actually and personally in his eye when he penned the words quoted by St. Matthew, but in the fact related by Hosea having a typical reference to a like fact in that after history which stands shadowed forth throughout in the outward history of ancient Israel.

It is in the same way that we are to understand the quotation from the 31st chapter of the prophecies of Jeremiah. It is in direct connexion with his statement of the fact that Herod sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, from two years old and under, that St. Matthew says, "Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet." "But Matthew," says Calvin, "does not mean that the prophet had predicted what Herod should do, but that at the advent of Christ that mourning was renewed which many ages before the women of Benjamin had made."

Primarily the words of the prophet referred to the carrying away of a large portion of the tribes of Benjamin and Judah captives to Babylon. In describing the bitter grief with which the heart of the country was then smitten, Jeremiah, by a figure as bold as it is picturesque and impressive, summons the long-buried Rachel, the mother of Benjamin, from her grave, representing her as roused from the sleep of ages to bewail the captivity of her children. But Rachel's grave lay near to Bethlehem, and now another bitter woe had come upon the land in the murder of those innocents in that village, and what more natural than that St. Matthew should revive, re-appropriate, and re-apply that image of Jeremiah, representing Rachel as anew issuing from her tomb to weep over these her slaughtered children?

But there was something more here than a mere apposite application to a scene of recent sorrow of a poetical image that originally referred to the grief caused by the captivity. That very grief which filled the land of Judah may have been intended to prefigure the lamentation that now filled Bethlehem and all its borders. Rachel rising from her tomb, and filling the air then with her lamentations, may

have been meant to stand as a type or representative of these mothers of Bethlehem, all torn in heart by the snatching of their little ones from their struggling arms, and the killing of them before their eyes. If it be so, then that passage in Jeremiah speaks of something more than of the mere suffering inflicted and the sorrow it produced. The weeping Rachel is not suffered to weep on, to weep out her grief. There are words of comfort for her in her tears. There is a message from the Lord to her that speaks in no ambiguous terms of the after-destiny, the future restoration of those children so rudely torn from their maternal embrace. For what are the words which immediately follow those which St. Matthew has quoted :—"Thus saith the Lord, Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears : for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord ; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border." If we have any right to apply this part of the prophecy to this incident of the evangelic history, then may we take the words that I have now quoted as carrying with them the assurance that those

children who perished under the stroke of Herod's hirelings died not spiritually ; that they shall come again from the land of the last enemy, come again with Him whose birth was so mysteriously connected with their death. We know that those infants, whose ghastly remains the weeping mothers gathered up to lay in their untimely graves, shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. To them that resurrection, itself a fruit of the Saviour's advent, must come as a boon, a benefit, not as a bane or curse. Let it be what it may to others, who have had full opportunity to receive or reject the Saviour, to them it can be nothing else than a resurrection into everlasting life. To believe otherwise of them, and of all who die in infancy, would be to believe that those who are called away from this world while yet the first dew-drops of life are on them, are placed thereby in a worse condition than that in which it is the declared purpose of the gospel to place all mankind. It is a belief which we cannot adopt. Our assurance is clear, and, as we think, well grounded—though these grounds we cannot now pause to unfold—that all who die in infancy are saved. Distinguished among them all, let us believe this of those

slaughtered babes of Bethlehem. Their fate was singularly wrapped up with that of the infant Saviour. The stroke that fell on them was meant for him ; the sword of persecution which swept so mercilessly in many an after age through the ranks of Christ's little ones was first reddened in their blood. The earliest victims to hatred of the Nazarene—if not consciously and willingly, yet actually dying for him—let us count them as the first martyrs for Jesus, and let us believe that in them the truth of the martyr's motto was first made good, "Near to the sword, near to God." "O blessed infants!" exclaims Augustine ; "He who at his birth had angels to proclaim him, the heavens to testify, and Magi to worship him, could surely have prevented that these should have died for him, had he not known that they died not in that death, but rather lived in higher bliss."

VI.

THE THIRTY YEARS AT NAZARETH—CHRIST AMONG THE DOCTORS.*

UP among the hills of Galilee, in a basin surrounded by swelling eminences, which shut it in on every side, lies the little village of Nazareth. Its name does not occur in Old Testament history. Josephus never mentions it, though he speaks of places lying all around it. Its inhabitants were not worse than their neighbors, nor exposed on account of their character to any particular contempt, yet Nathanael, himself a Galilean, could say, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? so small and insignificant was the place. It was here, as in a fit retreat, that the childhood, youth, and early manhood of our Lord passed quietly and unnoticed away. Those thirty

* Luke ii. 40-52.

years of the life of the Son of God upon this earth, how deeply hidden from us do they lie ! how profound the silence regarding them which the sacred writers preserve ! a silence all the more remarkable when we consider how natural and strong is our desire to know something, to be told something of the earlier days of any one who, at some after period of his life, has risen to distinction. But all that here is told us of the first twelve years of our Saviour's life is that the child grew, waxed strong in spirit, was filled with wisdom, and that the grace of God was upon him. Had any of these wonders which attended his birth been renewed, had anything supernatural occurred in the course of those years, we may presume it would have been related or alluded to. Nothing of that kind we may infer did happen. Outwardly and inwardly the growth of Jesus under Mary's care at Nazareth, obeyed the common laws under which human infancy and childhood are developed. Beyond that gentle patience which nothing could ruffle, that simple truthfulness which nothing could turn aside ; beyond that love which was always ready to give back smile for smile to Mary and the rest around, and to go forth rejoicingly on

its little errands of kindness within the home of the carpenter ; beyond that wisdom which, wonderful as it was, was childlike wisdom still, growing as his years grew, and deriving its increase from all the common sources which lay open to it ; beyond the charm of all the graces of childhood in their full beauty and in their unsullied perfection—there was nothing externally to distinguish his first twelve years. So we conclude from the absence of all notices of them in the gospel narrative. Of the void thus left, however, the Christian Church became early impatient. Many attempts were made to fill it up. In the course of the first four centuries numerous pseudo-gospels were in circulation, a long list of which has been made up out of the references to them which occur in the preserved writings of that period.* Some of these apocryphal gospels are still extant, two of them entitled the Gospel of the Infancy ; and it is very curious to notice how those succeeded who tried to lift the veil which covers the earlier years of Christ. One almost feels grateful that such early attempts were made to fill up the blank which the four Evan-

* See Jones on the Canon.

gelists have left.* They enable us to contrast the simplicity, the naturalness and consistency of all that the Evangelists have recorded of Christ, with such empty and unmeaning tales. They do more. These apocryphal gospels were written by Christians, by men who wished to honor Christ in all they said about him ; by men who had that portraiture of his character before them which the four Gospels supply ; and yet we find them narrating, as being in what seemed to them entire harmony with that character, that when boys interrupted Jesus in

* These Gospels of the infancy of our Lord are full of miracles of the most frivolous description, miracles represented as wrought first by the simple presence of the infant, by the clothes he wore, the water in which he was washed, wrought afterwards by the Son of Mary himself as he grew up at Nazareth, many alleged incidents of his boyhood there being gravely related, as when we are told that he and the other children of the village went out to play together, busying themselves in making clay into the shapes of various birds and beasts, whereupon Jesus commanded his beasts to walk, his birds to fly, and so excelled them all ; or again, when we are told that passing by a dyer's shop he saw many pieces of cloth laid out to be dyed, all of which he took and flung into a neighboring furnace, throwing the poor owner of the shop into an agony of consternation and grief, and then pleasantly relieving him by drawing all the pieces out of the furnace, each one now of the very color which had been desired. Such are the specimens, chosen chiefly because they are the least absurd of the many which are recorded in these Gospels. It was thus, as these writers would exhibit it, that the early boyhood of our Lord was spent ; it was by miracles such as those which I have recited, that he even then distinguished himself.

his play, or ran against him in the street of the village, he looked upon them and denounced them, and they fell down and died. It was said, I believe by Rousseau, that the conception and delineation of such a character as that of the man Christ Jesus, by such men as the fishermen of Galilee, would have been a greater miracle than the actual existence of such a man. In these apocryphal gospels we have a singular confirmation of that saying ; we have the proof that men better taught, many of them, than the Apostles even when they had the full delineation of the manhood of Jesus in their hands, could not attempt a fancy sketch of his childhood without not only violating our sense of propriety, by attributing to him the most puerile and unmeaning displays of divine power, but shocking our moral sense, and falsifying the very picture they had before their eyes, by attributing to him acts of vengeance.

Joseph and Mary "went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover." The Mosaic law required that all the male inhabitants of Judea should go up three times yearly to the capital, to keep the three great festivals of the Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. A later Rabbinical authority had laid an injunction

upon women to attend the feast of the Passover. Living as they did in so remote a part of the country, it is probable that the parents of our Lord satisfied themselves with going up together once yearly to Jerusalem ; Joseph thus doing less, and Mary more than the old law enjoined. When Jesus was twelve years old, Joseph and Mary took him up with them to Jerusalem. He had then reached that age, when, according to Jewish reckoning, he crossed the line which divides childhood from youth, got the new name of a son of the Lord, and had he been destined to any public office, would have passed into the hands of the Rabbis, for the higher instructions which their schools supplied. Jesus, however, had received no other instruction than the village school, attached to the synagogue at Nazareth, had supplied, and was destined to no higher employment than that of the trade his father followed. The purpose of Joseph and Mary in taking him up with them to Jerusalem was not that he might be placed at the feet of Gamaliel, or any other of the great distinguished teachers of the metropolis, but simply that he might see the holy city, and take part with them in the sacred services of the Passover.

There a new world opened to the boy's wondering eyes. With what interest must he have looked around, when first he trod the courts of the Temple, and gazed upon the ministering priests, the altar with its bleeding sacrifice and rising incense, the holy place, and the secret shrine that lay behind the veil! The places, too, of which we shall have to speak immediately, where youths of his own age were to be found, would not be left unvisited. What thoughts were stirred within his breast by all these sights, it becomes us not even to attempt to imagine. The key is not in our hands with which we might unlock the mysteries of his humanity at this stage of its development. He has himself so far unveiled his thoughts and feelings as to teach us how natural it was that he should linger in the holy city, and under the power of a new attraction feel for a day or two as if the ties that bound him to Nazareth and to his home there were broken.

The seven days of the feast went by. It had been a crowded procession from Galilee, which Joseph and Mary had joined. Galilee was then, as Josephus informs us, very thickly populated, studded with no less than two hun-

dred and forty towns, containing each fifteen thousand inhabitants or more, sending forth in the war with the Romans an army of no less than one hundred thousand men. The separate companies which this crowded population sent up at the Passover time to Jerusalem would each be large, and as the youths of the company consorted and slept near one another in the course of the journey, it is the less surprising that, on leaving Jerusalem to return to Nazareth, Joseph and Mary should not during the day have missed their son, who had stayed behind, nor have become aware of his absence till they sought for him among his companions when they rested for the night. The discovery was a peculiarly distressing one. What if some oversight had been committed by them? if they had failed to tell their son of the time of the departure, if they had failed to notice whether he was among the other youths before they left the city? They had such confidence in that child, who never before in a single instance had done anything to create anxiety or distrust; they were so sure that he would be where, as they thought, he ought to be, that they had scarcely felt perhaps an ordinary degree of parental solicitude. And

where could he now be ; what could have happened to him ? Their eager inquiries would probably soon satisfy them that he had not fallen aside by the way, that he had never joined the returning travellers, that he must have remained behind in Jerusalem. But with whom ? for what ? He knew no friends there with whom to stay. Had some accident befallen him ? was he detained against his will ? Did any one at Jerusalem know the secrets of his birth ; were there any there who still sought the young child's life ? Herod was dead ; Archelaus was banished ; the parents themselves had not been in Jerusalem since the time they had presented the infant in the temple. It was not likely they should be recognized ; none of their friends at Nazareth knew about the mysteries of the conception and the birth. They had thought there was no risk in taking Jesus with them, but now their hearts are full of dark forebodings ; some one may have known, may have told ; some secret design may still have been cherished. Where was their child, and what had happened unto him ?

You may imagine what a night of sleepless anxiety followed their discovery at the first

nightly resting-place of the caravan. Mid-day saw them back in the city. It is said to have been after three days' search they found him, if we count the day of their return as one of these three, there would still be one entire day's fruitless search. There may have been two such days,—days of eager inquiry everywhere throughout the city, in the house where they had lived, among all those with whom they had had any converse or connexion. At last they find the lost one, not in the courts of the Temple, not in any of those parts of the edifice consecrated to public worship, but in one of those apartments in the outer buildings used as a school of the Rabbis. Among the Jews at this period, each synagogue had a schoolroom attached to it, in which the rudiments of an ordinary education were taught. Besides, however, these schools for primary instruction, wherever there were ten men in a position to devote their whole time to this purpose, a room was built for them, in which they carried on their pupils in all the higher walks of the sacred learning of the Jews. These constituted the schools of the Rabbis, and formed an important instrument in the support and extension of that system of Rabbinism

which, as Milman tells us, “ became, after the ruin of the Temple, and the extinction of the public worship, a new bond of national union, and the great distinctive feature in the character of modern Judaism.” There were three apartments employed in this way attached to the Temple. It was in one of these that Joseph and Mary found their son. He was sitting in the ordinary attitude, and engaged in the ordinary exercises of a pupil in the middle of the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions,—the Jewish method of education being chiefly catechetical,—the pupil himself sometimes answering the questions put, and astonishing his hearers with his wisdom. When this strange, rude-looking, bright-looking, solemn-looking Galilean boy first came in among them, was it the wisdom he then showed which drew the hearts of some of these Rabbis to him, and led them, as if anxious to gain a scholar who might turn out to be the chief ornament of their school, to take him in and treat him tenderly? Was it with them, in the room they occupied in the outer Temple buildings, that the two nights in which Jesus was separated from his parents were spent? The tie, whatever it was, between him and them, is

now destined to be broken, never to be renewed.

Joseph and Mary find him in the midst of them. Joseph is too much astonished to say anything, nor is it likely that Mary spoke till he had gone with her apart; but now her burdened mother's heart finds utterance. "Son," she says to him, "why hast thou thus dealt with us?" words of reproach that were new to Mary's lips. Never before had she to chide that child. Never before had he done anything to require such chiding. But now, when it appears that no accident had happened, no restraint had been exercised, that it had been of his own free will that Jesus had parted from his parents, and was sitting so absorbed by other persons and with other things, she cannot account for such conduct on his part. It looks like neglect, and worse; like indifference to the pain which he must have known this separation would cost them. "Son," she says, "why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing."

Innocently, artlessly, childishly, in words which, though not meant to meet the reproach with a rebuke, yet carried with them much of

the meaning and effect of the words spoken afterwards at the marriage-feast at Cana, Jesus answers, "How is it that ye sought me?" 'could you, Mary, believe that I would act under other than heavenly guidance; could you allow the idea of my being liable to any risk or danger simply because I was not under your eye and care; do you not know, were you not told whose Son I truly am; and should not that knowledge have kept you from seeking and sorrowing as you have done: wist ye not, that wherever I was I must have been still beneath that Father's eye and care,—whatever I was about, I must have been about that Father's business? Mary, you have called me Son, and I acknowledge the relationship; you have called Joseph my father; that relationship I disown; my own, my only Father is He in whose house you have now found me, whose will I came on earth to do; about whose matters I must constantly, and shall now henceforth and forever be engaged.'

It is in this consciousness of his peculiar relationship to God, now for the first time, perhaps, fully realized, that we catch the true meaning, and can discern something of the purpose of this early, only recorded incident in

the history of our Lord's youth. Mary, we are told, understood not the answer of her son. With the knowledge that she possessed, we can scarcely imagine that she had any difficulty in at once perceiving that Jesus spake of his Father in heaven, and comprehending in so far at least the meaning of his words. But there may have been a special reason for Mary's surprise here—the difficulty she felt of comprehension and belief. It cannot readily be imagined that she had herself told her child during the first twelve years of his life, or that any one else had told him, of the mystery of his birth. From the first dawning of conscious intelligence, he must have been taught to call Joseph father, nor had it outwardly been communicated to him that he was only his reputed father, that he had no earthly parent, that his true and only father was God. If that were the actual state of the connexion between Mary and Jesus up to the time of this incident in the Temple; if she had never breathed to him the great secret that he was none other than the Son of the Highest; if there had been nothing as she knew there was not, in the quiet tenor of the life which for twelve years Jesus lived, to afford any outward indication

or evidence, either to himself or others of the nature of his Sonship to God—then how surprised must Mary have been when in the Temple, and by that answer to her question, Jesus informed her that he knew all, knew whence he was, knew for what he came, knew that God was his Father in such a sense that the discharge of his business carried with it an obligation which, if the time and the season required, overbore all obligation to real or reputed earthly parents.

But whether it came upon Mary by surprise or not, was there no object in letting us and all believers in the Saviour know, as the record of this incident does, that Jesus was thus early and fully alive to the singularity of his relationship to God? Conceive that it had been otherwise; that these thirty years had been veiled in an impenetrable obscurity; that not one single glimpse had been given of how they passed away; that our first sight of the man Christ Jesus had been when he stood before John to be baptized in the waters of the Jordan, and to receive the Holy Ghost descending upon him. How natural in that case had been the impression that it was then for the first time, when the voice from heaven declared it,

that he knew himself to be the Son of God : that it was then, when the Spirit first descended, that the Divine associated itself in close and ineffable union with the human. Then had those thirty years appeared in a quite different light to us ; then had we conceived of him as living throughout their course the simple common life of a Galilean villager and craftsman. But now we know, and we have to thank this narrative of St. Luke for the information, that if not earlier, yet certainly at his twelfth year, the knowledge that he and the Father were one, that the Father was in him, and that he was in the Father, had visited and filled his spirit, had animated and regulated his life. With what a new sacredness and dignity do the eighteen years that intervened between this incident and that of his public manifestation to Israel become invested, and what new lessons of instruction do they bring us ! At the bidding of a new impulse, excited within his youthful breast by this first visit to the Temple, he breaks for a day or two all earthly bonds, and seems lost amid the shadows of the Sanctuary, absorbed with the higher things of Him who was worshipped there. But at the call of duty his hour for public service

for speaking, acting, suffering, dying, before all and for all, and not yet come, he yields at once to the desire of Joseph and Mary, and returns with them to Nazareth ; becoming subject to them, burying, as it were, this great secret in his breast ; consenting to wait, submitting to all the restraints of an ordinary household, putting himself once more under the yoke of parental authority, taking upon him all the common obligations of son, a brother, a neighbor, a friend, a Galilean villager, a Jewish citizen ; discharging all without a taint of sin ; travelling not an inch beyond the routine of service expected in these relationships ; doing absolutely nothing to betray the divinity that lay within, nothing to distinguish himself above others, or to proclaim his heavenly birth ; living so naturally, unostentatiously, undemonstratively, that neither did his brethren the inmates of his home, his own nearest relatives, believe in him, discerning not in all those years any marks of his divine prophetic character ; his name so little known in the immediate neighborhood that Nathanael, who lived in Cana, a few miles off, had never heard of him, and was quite unprepared to believe Philip, when he told him, that in one Jesus of Naz-

areth he had found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write.

From the bosom of that thick darkness which covers the first thirty years of our Lord's earthly life, there thus shines forth the light which irradiates the whole period, and sheds over it a lustre brighter than ever graced the life of any other of the children of men. You may have wondered at this one event of his childhood being redeemed from oblivion, so insignificant does it seem, and at first sight so little correspondent with our preconceived conceptions of the great Messiah's character and work. Looking at Jesus as nothing more than the son of Joseph and Mary, there might be some difficulty in explaining his desertion of them at Jerusalem. But when you reflect on his self-recognition at this time as the Son of God ; on his declaration of it to Mary ; on his thenceforth acting on it in life ; on his words in the Temple, followed by eighteen years of self-denial, and gentle, cheerful, prompt obedience ; on his growing consciousness of his divine lineage, and his earthly work and heavenly heritage ; on the evils he came on earth to expose and remedy ; on the selfishness, the worldliness, the formalism, the hypocrisy, he

detected all around him at Nazareth—when you reflect further on his divine reticence, on his sublime and patient self-restraint, on his refraining from all interference in public matters, and all exposure to public notice, on his devoting himself instead to the tasks of daily duty in a very humble sphere of life ; when you reflect fixedly and thoughtfully on these things, do you not feel that there rests on this portion of the life of Jesus, and upon its introductory and explanatory incident, an interest different indeed in kind, yet in full and perfect harmony with that belonging to the period when he stood forth as the Saviour of the world ? If he came to empty himself of that glory which he had with the Father before the world was, to take upon him the form of a servant, to seek not his own glory, to do not his own will, not to be ministered unto but to minister, then assuredly it was not only during the three years of his public ministry, but during all the three-and-thirty years of his life on earth, that the ends of his mission were accomplished.

We think, I apprehend, too little of these quiet domestic years of secluded, unpretending piety at Nazareth. Our eyes are dazzled by

the outward glory which surrounded his path when he burst at last from his long concealment, and showed himself as the Son of the Highest ; and yet there is a sense in which we should have more interest in the earlier than in the later period of his life. It is liker the life we have ourselves to lead. The Jesus of Nazareth is more of a pattern to us than the Jesus of Gethsemane and the Cross. He was not less the Son of God in the one case than in the other ; not less in the one character than in the other has he left us an example that we should follow his steps. It was thus the great lesson of his life at Nazareth, as interpreted by his sayings in the Temple, that we should be doing our Father's business in the counting-house, in the workshop, at the desk, as much as in any of the higher or more public walks of Christian or philanthropic effort ; that a life confined and devoted to the faithful execution of the simple, humble offices of daily domestic duty, if it be a life of faith and love, may be one as full of God, as truly divine and holy, as Christ-like and as honoring to Christ, as a life devoted to the most important public services that can be rendered to the Church on earth. In the quiet and deep-lying valleys of life, all

hidden from human eye, who may tell us how many there are who, built up in a humble trust in Jesus, and animated by their hope in him, are performing cheerfully their daily tasks because a Father's wisdom has allotted them, and bearing patiently their daily burdens because they have been imposed by a Father's love? Content to live and labor, and endure and die, unnoticed and unknown, earthly fame hanging no wreath upon their tomb, earthly eloquence dumb over their dust, these are they, the last among men, who shall be among the first in the kingdom of the just.

VII.

THE FORERUNNER.*

THE same angel who announced to Mary at Nazareth the birth of Jesus, had six months previously announced the birth of John to the aged priest Zacharias, as he ministered before the altar, within the Temple at Jerusalem. Zacharias was informed that his wife Elizabeth should have a son, whose name was to be John, who was to be "great in the sight of the Lord," going before him "in the spirit and power of Elias, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Zacharias doubted what the angel said. At once as a punishment of his incredulity, and as a new token of the truth of the angelic message, he was struck with a temporary dumbness. When he came forth he could not tell his brother priests or the assembled people anything about what he had seen

* Luke i. 1-18; Matt. iii. 1-12; Mark i. 1-8.

or heard within. From the signs he made, and the strange awe-struck expression of his countenance, they fancied he had seen a vision ; but it is not likely that he took any means of correcting whatever false ideas they entertained. His one wish, was to get home and reveal the secret to his wife Elizabeth. His days of ministration lasted but a week, and as soon as they were over, he hastened to his residence in the hill country of Judea. In due time what Gabriel had foretold took place. The child was born. The eighth day, the day for its circumcision, and the bestowing of its name arrived. A large circle of relatives assembled. They proposed that the child should be called Zacharias, after his father. Foreseeing that some such proposal might be made, Zacharias had provided against any other name than that assigned by the angel being given to his son. Acting upon his instructions, Elizabeth interposed, and declared that the child's name should be John. The relatives remonstrated. None of her kindred, they reminded her, had ever borne that name. The dumb father was now by signs appealed to. He called for a writing-table, and wrote the few decisive words, "His name is John." They were all

wondering at the prompt and peremptory settlement of this question, when another and greater ground of wonder was supplied: the tongue of the dumb was loosed, and, in rapt, rhythmical, prophetic strains that remind us forcibly of those in which, three months before, and in the same dwelling, Mary and Elizabeth had exchanged their greetings, he poured out fervent thanks to God for having visited and redeemed his people, and foretold the high office which his own new-born son was to execute as Forerunner of the Messiah.

With that scene of the circumcision day the curtain drops upon the household of Zacharias and Elizabeth, nor is it lifted till many years are gone, and then it is the child only, now grown to manhood, who appears. His parents had been well stricken in years at the date of his birth, and as no mention of them is made afterwards, we may presume that like Joseph they were dead before anything remarkable in the life of their son had happened. Little as we know of the first thirty years of the life of Jesus, we know still less of the like period in the life of John. All that we are told is that till the time of his showing unto Israel he was in the desert, in those wild and lonely regions

which lay near his birthplace, skirting the northwestern shores of the Dead Sea. True to the angelic designation, accepting the vow that marked him as a Nazarite from his birth, John separated himself early from home and kindred, retired from the haunts of men, buried himself in the rocky solitudes of the wilderness, letting his hair grow till it fell loose and dishevelled over his shoulders, denying himself to all ordinary indulgences, whether of food or dress, clothing himself with the roughest kind of garment he could get, a robe of hair-cloth, bound around him with a leathern girdle, satisfying himself by feeding on the locusts and wild honey of the desert. But it was not in a morose or ascetic spirit that he did so. He had not fled to those solitudes in chagrin, to nurse upon the lap of indolence regrets over bygone disappointments ; nor had he sought there to shroud his spirit in a religious gloom deep as that of Engedi and Adullam, which may have been among his haunts. His whole appearance and bearing, words and actions, when at last he stood forth before the people, satisfy us that there was little in him of the mystic, the misanthrope, or the monk. Though dwelling apart from others, avoiding

observation, and shunning promiscuous intercourse, he was not wasting those years in idleness, heedless of the task for the performance of which the life he led was intended, as we presume he must have been informed by his parents, to prepare him to execute. Through the loop-holes of retreat we can well imagine the Baptist as busily scanning the state of that community upon which he was to act. When he stepped forth from his retirement, and men of all kinds and classes gathered round him, he did not need any one to tell him who the Pharisees, or the Sadducees, or the publicans were, or what were their peculiar and distinctive faults. He appears from the first to have been well informed as to the state of things outside the desert. It may, in truth, in no small measure have served to fit him for his peculiar work that—removed from all the influences which must have served, had he lived among them, to blunt his sense of surrounding evils, and to mould his character and habits according to the prevailing forms and fashions of Jewish life—he was carried by the Spirit into the desert to be trained and educated there, thence, as from a watch-tower, to look down upon those strange sights which his country

was presenting, undistractedly to watch, profoundly to muse and meditate, the fervor of a true prophet of the Lord kindling and glowing into an intenser fire of holy zeal; till at last, when the hour for action came, he launched forth upon his brief earthly work, with a swift impetuosity like the rush of those short-lived cataracts, yet with a firmness of unbending will and purpose, like the stability of those rocky heights among which for thirty years he had been living.

But what had those thirty years in the current of Jewish history presented? At their beginning those intestine wars which previously had somewhat weakened the Roman power, had closed in the peaceful establishment of the Empire under Augustus Cæsar. The dangers to Jewish liberty grew all the greater, and the impatience of the people under the Roman yoke became the more intense; the extreme patriot party, who were in favor with the people generally, became fanatic in their zeal. After the death of Herod the Great, while yet it remained uncertain whether Augustus would recognize the accession of Archelaus to the throne, an insurrection broke out in Jerusalem, which was only quelled by the slaughter of

three thousand of the insurgents, and by the ill-omened stoppage of the great Passover festival. Augustus, unwilling to lay any heavier yoke on those who were already fretting beneath the one they bore, confirmed the will of Herod by which he divided his kingdom among his sons, suffered the Jews still to have nominally a government of their own, and recognized Archelaus as king over Judea and Samaria. His reign was a short and troubled one, and at its close Judea and Samaria were attached to Syria, made part of a Roman province, and had procurators or governors from Rome set over them, of whom the sixth in order was Pontius Pilate, who entered upon his office about the very time when the Baptist began his ministry. The lingering shadows of royalty and independence were thus removed. Not content with removing them, the usurper intermeddled with the ecclesiastical as well as the civil government of Judea. In the Mosaic Institute, the High Priest, the most important public functionary of the Jews, attained his office hereditarily, and held it for life. The Emperor now claimed and exercised the right of investiture, and appointed and deposed as he pleased. During the period between the

death of Herod and the destruction of Jerusalem, we read of twenty-eight High Priests holding the office in succession, only one of whom retained it till his death. This dependence on Rome, not only for the appointment but for continuance in it, necessarily generated great servility on the part of aspirants to the office, and great abuses in the manner in which its duties were discharged. A supple, sagacious, venal man, like Annas, though not able to establish himself permanently in the chair, was able to secure it in turn for five of his sons, for his son-in-law Caiaphas, with whom he was associated at the time of the crucifixion, and afterwards for his grandson. Such a state of things among the governing authorities fomented the popular animosity to the foreign rule. The whole country was in a ferment. Popular outbreaks were constantly occurring. The public mind was in such an inflammable condition that any adventurer daring enough, and strong enough to raise the standard of revolt, was followed by multitudes. Among these insurrectionary chiefs, some of whom were of the lowest condition and the most worthless character, Judas of Galilee distinguished himself by his open proclamation of the principle

that it was not lawful to pay tribute to Cæsar, and his political creed was adopted by thousands who had not the courage, as he had, to pay the penalty of their lives in acting it out. It can easily be imagined what a fresh hold their faith and hopes as to the foretold Messiah would take upon the hearts of a people thus galled and fretted to the uttermost by political discontent. The higher views of his character would naturally be swallowed up and lost in the conception of him as the great deliverer who was to break those hated bonds which bound them, restore the old Theocracy, and make Jerusalem, not Rome, the seat and centre of a universal monarchy.

Such was the state of public affairs and of the public feeling when a voice loud and thrilling like the voice of a trumpet, issues from the desert, saying, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Crowds come forth to listen ; they look at the strange man, true son of the desert, from whose lips this voice cometh. He has all the aspect, he wears the dress, of one of their old prophets. They ask about him ; he is of the priestly order. Some old men begin now to remember about his father in the Temple, and the strange "say-

ings that were noised abroad through all the hill country of Judea" soon after his birth. They listen to his words ; it is true he does not directly claim divine authority ; the old prophetic formula, " Thus saith the Lord," he does not employ ; he points to no sign, he works no miracle ; he trusts to the simple power of the summons he makes, the prophecy he utters ; yet there is something in the very manner of his utterance so prophet-like, that a prophet they cannot help believing him to be. There is nothing particularly ingratiating in his call to repent, but the announcement that the kingdom of heaven is at the door, and that they must all at once arise and prepare for it, meets the deepest, warmest, wishes of their hearts. It is at hand at last, this strange man says—the kingdom for which they have so long been waiting ; and shall they not go forth to welcome its approach, and rejoice in its triumphs ? The spell of the Baptist's preaching, on whatever it lay, was one that operated with a speed and a power, and to an extent of which we have the parallel only in times of the greatest excitement, like those of the Crusades, or of the Reformation. " Then went out to him," we are told, " all Judea, and they of Jerusa-

lem, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins." It would seem as if with one consent the entire population of the southern part of Palestine had gathered around the Baptist, and for the time were pliant in his hands. It may have facilitated their assemblage, if, as has been conjectured, it was a Sabbath year when John began his work, and the people, set free from their ordinary labors, were ready to follow him, as he led them to the banks of the Jordan to be baptized.

This baptism in the river was so marked a feature in the ministry of John, that it gave him his distinctive title, The Baptist. It was a new and peculiar rite ; of Divine appointment, as appears not only from the question which our Lord put to the Jewish rulers, " The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men ? " but also from the declaration of John himself, " He that sent me to baptize with water." It may have been suggested by, as it was in some respects similar to, the various ablutions or washings with water prescribed in the Mosaic ritual ; yet from all of these baptisms, if baptisms they could be called, it differed in many respects. They were all intended simply as

instruments of purification from ceremonial defilement ; it had another character and object. With a few exceptional cases, they were all performed by the person's own hands, who went through the process of purification ; it was performed by another, by the hands of John himself, or some of his disciples. They were repeated as often as the defilement was renewed ; it was administered only once. There was indeed one Jewish custom which, if then in use, presents a clear analogy to the baptism of John. When proselytes from heathenism were admitted into the pale of the Jewish commonwealth, after circumcision they were baptized. "They bring the proselyte," says an old Jewish authority,* "to baptism, and being placed in the water, they again instruct him in some weightier and in some lighter commands of the law, which being heard, he plunges himself and comes up, and behold he is an Israelite in all things." It would look as if the baptism of John was borrowed from this proselyte baptism of the Jews ; but though it were, it will at once appear to you that the former rite had marked pecu-

* Maimonides.

liarities of its own. And as it stood thus distinguished from all Jewish, so also did it stand distinguished from the Christian rite ordained by our Lord himself, which involved a fuller faith, symbolized a higher privilege, and was always administered in the name of Christ. The one rite might be regarded indeed as running into and being superseded by the other, but of the great difference between them we have proof in the fact that those who had received the baptism of John were nevertheless re-baptized on their admission into the Christian Church.* John's baptism, like everything about his ministry, was imperfect, preparatory, temporary, and transient, involving simply a confession of unworthiness, and a faith in one to come, through whom the remission of sins was to be conveyed.

The people who flocked around John readily submitted to his baptism, whether regarding it as altogether new, or the modified form of some of their own old observances. The accompaniment of his teaching with the administration of such an ordinance may have helped to reconcile the Pharisees, who were such lovers of the

* See Acts xix.

ritualistic, to a preaching which had little in itself to recommend it to them, as the absence on the other hand of all doctrinal instruction, all references to the unseen world, to angels and spirits, and the resurrection, may have helped to conciliate the prejudices of the Sadducees. At any rate, we learn that, borne along with the flowing tide, Pharisees and Sadducees did actually present themselves before John to claim baptism at his hands. His quick, keen, spiritual insight at once detected the veiled deceit that lay in their doing so, and in the very spirit which his great Master afterwards displayed, he proceeded to denounce their hypocrisy, giving them indeed the very title which Jesus bestowed on them. John's whole ministry, his teaching and baptizing, if it meant anything, meant this, that without an inward spiritual change, without penitence, without reformation, no Israelite was prepared to enter into that kingdom whose advent he announced. His preaching was the preaching of repentance, his baptism the baptism of repentance ; the one great lesson the whole involved, was that all Israel had become spiritually unfit for welcoming the Messiah, and sharing the blessings of his reign. But here

were some, the Pharisees and Sadducees who now stood before him, of whom he knew, that so far from their entertaining the least idea that they required to go through any such process, regarded themselves as pre-eminently the very ones to whom, from their position in Israel, this kingdom was at once to bring its blessings. Penetrating their secret thoughts, the Baptist said to them, "Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father," and therefore are, simply as his descendants, entitled to all the benefits of that kingdom which is to be set up in Judea; "I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham;"—a dim, yet not uncertain pre-intimation of the spiritual character and wide extension of the new kingdom of God; the possibility even of the outcast and down-trodden Gentile being admitted into it.

John's bold and honest treatment of the Pharisees and Sadducees only made him look the more prophet-like in the eyes of the common people. It encouraged them to ask, What shall we do then? In a form of precept like to that which Christ frequently employed, John said to them, "He that hath two coats,

let him impart to him that hath none. He that hath meat, let him do likewise." There is no better sign morally of a community than when such kindly links of brotherly sympathy so bind together all classes, as that those who have are ever ready to help those who want ; as, on the other hand, there is no clearer proof of a community morally disorganized than the absence of this benevolent disposition. Judea was at this time, both as to its religious and political condition, thoroughly disorganized, and in inculcating in this direct and emphatic way, the great duty of a universal charity, John was at once laying bare one of the sorest of existing evils, and pointing to the method of its cure.

Then came to him the Publicans also, those Jews who for gain's sake had farmed the taxes imposed by the Romans ; a class odious and despised, looked upon by their countrymen generally as traitors, who, by extortion, drew large profits out of the national degradation. They, too, get the answer exactly suited to them : " Exact no more than what is appointed to you." Then came to him soldiers, Jews we may believe who had enlisted under the Roman standard, and who, not satisfied with the

soldier's common pay, abused their power as the military police of the country, and by force, or threat of accusation before the higher authorities, sought to improve their condition. They, too, get the answer suited to their case: "Do violence to no man: neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages." These are but a few stray specimens of the manner in which the Baptist dealt with those who came to him: one quite new, yet so much needed. What power must have been exerted over a people so long accustomed to the inculcation of a mere ceremonial pietism, by this thoroughly intrepid, downright, plain, practical, unaccommodating and uncompromising kind of teaching! The great secret of its success lay here, that unsupported by any confirming signs from heaven,—in a certain sense not needing them,—he inculcated the duties of justice, truthfulness, forbearance, charity, by a direct appeal to the simple, naked sense of right and wrong that dwells in every human bosom. And the world has seldom seen a more striking proof of the power of conscience, and of the response which, when taken suddenly, and before it has time to get warped and biased, conscience will give to all direct.

sincere, and vigorous addresses to it, than when those multitudes from Judea and Jerusalem, and all the land, gathered round the Baptist on the banks of the Jordan.

What an animating spectacle must these banks have then exhibited ; a spectacle which has ever since been annually renewed by the resort of thousands of pilgrims thither. Our last and best describer of Palestine* brings it thus before our eyes : “No common spring or tank would meet the necessities of the multitudes. The Jordan now seemed to have met with its fit purpose. It was the one river of Palestine sacred in its recollections, abundant in its waters ; and yet at the same time the river not of cities but of the wilderness, the scene of the preaching of those who dwelt not in kings’ palaces, nor wore soft clothing. On the banks of the rushing stream the multitudes gathered ;—the priests and scribes from Jerusalem, down the pass of Adummim ; the publicans from Jericho on the south, and the Lake of Gennesareth on the north ; the soldiers on their way from Damascus to Petra, through the Ghor, in the war with the Arab chief Ha-

* Stanley.

reth ; the peasants from Galilee, with One from Nazareth, through the opening of the plain of Esdraelon. The tall reeds or canes in the jungle waved, shaken by the wind ; the pebbles of the bare clay hills lay around, to which the Baptist pointed as capable of being transformed into the children of Abraham ; at their feet rushed the refreshing stream of the never-failing river."

This description, indeed, applies to a period in the narrative a little further on than the one which is now immediately before us. The "One from Nazareth" may have left his village home, and been already on the way, but as yet he was buried in obscurity, deep hidden among the people. All the people were musing in their hearts whether John were not himself the Christ. He knew what was in their hearts ; he knew how ready they were to hail him as their promised deliverer. No man of his degree has ever had a fairer opportunity of lifting himself to high repute upon the shoulders of an acclaiming multitude. Did the tempting thought for a moment flit across his mind that he should seize upon the occasion so presented ? If it did, he was in haste to expel the intruder, and prevent the multi-

tude by at once proclaiming that he was not the great prophet they were ready to believe he was ; that another was at hand much greater than he, to whom he was not worthy to discharge the lowest and most menial office of a slave, the carrying of his sandal, the unloosing of his shoe-latchet. He, John, baptized with water unto repentance, an incomplete and altogether preparatory affair, but the greater than he would baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire.

Such was the prompt and decisive manner in which he disowned all high pretensions. And when, shortly afterwards, posterior to our Lord's baptism, of which they may have heard nothing, a deputation from Jerusalem came down to ask him, Who art thou ? he met the question with the emphatic negative, I am not the Christ. Art thou Elias then ? they said. John knew that the men who put this query to him were caring only about his person, and careless about his office,—in the true spirit of all religious formalists, wanting so much to know who the teacher was, and but little heeding what his teaching meant ; he knew that their idea was that the heavens were to give back Elijah to the earth, and that he was to

appear in person to announce and anoint the Messiah, and that many of them believed that besides Elias another of the old prophets was to arise from the dead, to dignify by his presence the great era of the Messiah's inauguration. Answering their questions according to the meaning of the questioners when they said, Art thou Elias? he said, I am not; when they asked him, Art thou that prophet? he answered, No. And when still further they inquired, Who art thou then, that we may give an answer to them that sent us? he said, that he was but a voice and nothing more, "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias." Pressing him still further by the interrogation, why it was that he baptized if he were neither Christ, nor Elias, nor that prophet; he speaks again of his own baptism as if it were too insignificant a matter for any question about his right to administer it being raised or answered, and of the greater than he already revealed to him by the sign from heaven: "I baptize with water, but there standeth one among you whom ye know not. He it is who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe-latchet I am not worthy to unloose."

It is this prompt acknowledgment of his own infinite inferiority to Christ, his thorough appreciation of the relative position in which he stood to Jesus, the readiness with which he undertook the honorable but humble task of being but his herald, the unimpeachable fidelity and unfaltering steadiness with which he fulfilled the special course marked out for him by God, and above all the entire and apparently unconscious self-abnegation which in doing so he displayed, that shine forth as the prominent features in the personal character of the Baptist.

To these, particularly to the last, we shall have occasion hereafter to allude. Meanwhile, let us dwell a moment on the place and office which the ministry of John occupied midway between the old and the new economy. "The law and the prophets were until John." In him and with him they expired. He was a prophet, the only one among them all whose coming and whose office were themselves of old the subject of prophecy, honored above them all by the nearness of his standing to Jesus, by his being the friend of the Bridegroom, to whom it was given to hear the Bridegroom's living voice. But he was more than a prophet.

Of the greatest of his predecessors, of Moses, of Elijah, of Daniel, it was true that they filled but a limited space in the great dispensation with which they were connected ; their days but an handbreadth in the broad cycle of events with which their lives and labors were wrapped up, the individuality of each, if not lost among, yet linked with that of a multitude of compeers. But John presents himself alone. The prophet of the desert, the forerunner of the Lord, appears without a coadjutor, a whole distinct economy in himself. To announce Christ's ædvent, to break up the way before him, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord, this was the specific object of that economy which began and ended in John's ministry.

The kind, and amount of the service which the Baptist thus rendered, as well as the need of it, it is difficult for us now thoroughly to understand and appreciate. In what respect Christ would have been placed at a disadvantage had not John preceded him ; in what respects the Baptist did open up the way before the Lord ; in what respects John's ministry told upon the condition of the Jewish people, morally and spiritually, so as to make it different from what it otherwise would have been—

so as to make the soil all the better prepared to receive the seed which the hand of the Divine sower scattered—it is not very easy for us to estimate. One thing is clear enough, that it was John's hand which struck the first bold stroke at the root of the strong national prejudice which narrowed and carnalized the expected kingdom of their Messiah. It is quite possible, that, as to the true nature and extent of the coming kingdom, John may have been as much in the dark as the twelve apostles were till the day of Pentecost. One thing, however, was revealed to him in clearest light, and it was upon his knowledge of this that he spoke with such authority and power, that whatever the future kingdom was to be, it should be one in which force and fraud, and selfishness and insincerity, and all sham piety, were to be denied a place; for which those would stand best prepared who were readiest to confess and give up their sins, and to act justly and benevolently towards their fellow-men, humbly and sincerely towards their God. You have but the rudiments, indeed, of the true doctrine of repentance in the teaching of the Baptist—the Christian doctrine but in germ; but it is not difficult to see in it the

same great lesson broached as to the inner and spiritual qualifications required of all the members of the kingdom of Christ, which was afterwards, with so much greater depth and fullness, unfolded privately to Nicodemus at the very beginning of our Lord's ministry in Judea, when he said to him : " Except a man be born again, he cannot see, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God ;" and publicly to the multitudes on the hill-side of Galilee, when the Lord said to them ; " Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

It would be quite wrong, it would indicate an ignorance of the peculiar service which the Baptist was called upon to render, were we to imagine that there must be a preparatory process of repentance and reformation gone through by each of us before we believe in Jesus, and by faith enter the kingdom. Our position is so different from that occupied by the multitude to whom John preached, that what was most suitable for them is not so suitable for us.

And yet not without some broad and general lessons for the Church, at all times and in all ages, was it ordered so that the gentle preacher of peace should be preceded by the

stern preacher of repentance ; that John should be seen in the desert in advance of Jesus—in his appearance, his haunts, his habits, his words, his ordinance, proclaiming, and symbolizing the duty and discipline of penitence. It was only thus, by the ministry of the one running into the ministry of the other, that the Christian life, in its acts of penitence, as well as in its acts of faith and love, could stand before us in vivid relief, embodied in a full-orbed and personal portraiture. Jesus had no sin of his own to mourn over, no evil dispositions to subdue, no evil habits to relinquish. In the person, character, and life of Jesus, the great and needful duty of mortifying the body of sin and death could receive no visible illustration. He could supply to us no model or exemplar here. Was it not then wisely ordered that moving before, and for a time beside him, there should be seen that severer figure of the Baptist, as if to tell us that the proud spirit that is in us must be bowed, and the mountain-heights of pride in us be laid low, and the crooked things be made straight, and the rough places plain, to make way for the coming in of the Prince of Peace, and the setting up of his kingdom in

our hearts ; that we must go with the Baptist into the solitudes of the desert, as well as with the Saviour into the happy homes and villages of Galilee ? Would you see, in its full, finished, and perfect form, the character and course of conduct, which, as followers of the Crucified, we are to aim at and to realize, go study it in the life of Jesus. But would you see it in its formation as well as in its finish, go study it in the life of the Baptist ; put the two together, John and Jesus, and the portraiture is complete.

VIII.

THE BAPTISM.*

WE have no definite information as to the date of the commencement of John's ministry, or his own age at that time. As we know, however, that he was six months older than Jesus, as we are told that Jesus was about thirty years of age when he began his public ministry, and as that was the age fixed in the Jewish law for the priests entering on the duties of their office, it seems reasonable to conclude that the ministry of John had already lasted for six months when Jesus presented himself before the Baptist on the banks of the Jordan. This would allow full time for intelligence of a movement which so rapidly pervaded the entire population of the southern districts of the country, penetrating Galilee,

* Matt. iii. 13-17 ; Mark i. 9-11 ; Luke iii. 21-23 ; John i. 30-33.

and reaching even to Nazareth. Moved by this intelligence, other Galileans of that district as well as Jesus may have followed the wake of the multitude, and directed their steps to the place where John was baptizing. In these circumstances Christ's departure from his home may not have created the surprise which it otherwise would have done. When Mary saw her son, who had hitherto so quietly and exclusively devoted himself to their discharge, throw up all his household duties and depart : when she learned whither it was that his footsteps were tending, and gathered, as she may have done, from the tidings which were then afloat, that it was none other than the son of her relative Elizabeth who was shaking the entire community of the south by his summons to repent, and his proclamation of the nearness of the kingdom, she could scarcely have let Jesus go, for the first time that he had ever so parted from her, without following him with many wistful, wondering anxieties and hopes. But she did not know that he now left that home in Nazareth never but for a few days to return to it. Had she known it, could she have let him go alone ? It was alone, however, and externally undistinguished among the crowd,

that Jesus stood before John, and craved baptism at his hands. He did this in the simplest, least ostentatious way, allowing the great mass of the baptisms to be over, mingling with the people and offering himself as one of the last to whom the rite was to be administered. "It came to pass," Luke tells, that "when all the people were baptized," Jesus was baptized also. But his baptism did not go past as the others did. So soon as John's eye fell upon this new candidate for the ordinance, he saw in him one altogether different in person and character from any who had hitherto been baptized. He felt at once as if this administration of his baptism would be altogether out of place ; that for Jesus to be baptized by him would be to invert the relationship in which he knew and felt that they stood to one another. By earnest speech or expressive gesture he intimated his unwillingness to comply with the request. The word which St. Matthew uses in telling us that John forbade him, is one indicative of a very strenuous refusal on his part. This refusal he accompanied with the words : "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me ?"

These words, you will particularly remark,

were spoken at the commencement of their interview, before the baptism of our Lord, before that sign from heaven was given of which he had been forewarned, and for which he was to wait before pronouncing of any individual that he was the greater One who was to come, who was to baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire. Till he saw the Spirit descending and remaining, John could not know certainly, and had no warrant authoritatively to say that this was He of whom he spake. From the Baptist saying twice afterwards, "I knew him not," it has been imagined that up to this meeting John had never seen Jesus, had no personal acquaintance with his relative the son of Mary ; and the distance at which they lived from one another, with the entire length of the land between them, the retired life of the one at Nazareth, and the dwelling of the other in the desert, have been referred to as explaining the absence of all acquaintance and intercourse. That there could have been but little intercourse is clear ; that they may never have seen each other till now is possible. But if so, how are we to explain John's meeting the proposal of Jesus with so instant and earnest a declaration, and saying to him, I have

need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? Jesus must either before these words were spoken have told John who he was, and the Baptist must have known from ordinary sources what a sinless and holy life he had been leading for these thirty years at Nazareth, or this knowledge must have been supernaturally communicated; for knowledge of Jesus to this extent at least, that he was no fit subject for a baptism which was for sinners, was obviously implied in this address.

Is it, however, so certain, or even so probable, that John and Jesus had never met till now? Zacharias and Elizabeth had to instruct their son as to his earthly work, his heavenly calling, and in doing so must have told him of the visit of Mary, and the birth of Jesus. He must have learned from them enough to direct his eye longingly and expectantly to his Galilean relative as no other than the Messiah, for whose coming he was to prepare the people. True, he retired early to the desert, which was his place of ordinary residence till the time of his showing unto Israel, but did that imply that he never was at Jerusalem, never went up to the great yearly festivals? Jesus was once, at least, in Jerusalem in his

youth, and may have been often there before his thirtieth year. So, too, may it have been with John, and if so, they must have met there, and become acquainted with one another. Much, however, as there may have been to lead John to the belief that Jesus was he that was to come after him, the lapse of those thirty years, during which the two had been almost totally separated, and the absence of all sign or token of the Messiahship during Christ's secluded life at Nazareth, may have led him to doubt. Even after he had received his great commission he might continue in the same state of uncertainty, waiting, as he had been instructed, till the sign from heaven was given. Whatever John's inward surmises or convictions may have been, he must have felt that it became him neither to speak of them nor to act on them, till the promised and visible token of the Messiahship lighted on him whom he was then to hold forth to the people as the Lamb of God, who was to take away the sin of the world. Such we conceive to have been the state of John's mind and feelings towards Jesus when he presented himself before him for baptism. From previous acquaintance he may instantly have recognized him as the son

of Mary, to whom his thoughts and hopes had for so many years been pointing. He certainly did at once recognize him as his superior, as one at least so much holier than himself that he shrunk from baptizing him. But he did not certainly know him as the Christ the Son of God ; did not so know him at least as to be entitled to point him out as such to the people. When, some weeks afterwards, he actually did so, he was at pains to tell those whom he addressed that it was not upon the ground of any previous personal knowledge, or individual connexion, that he spake of him as he did. "I knew him not," he said ; " but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bear record that this is the Son of God."

We now know more of Jesus than perhaps John did when Christ stood before him to be baptized ; we know that he was the Holy One of God, who had no sin of his own to confess, no pollution to wash away ; and we too, like John, may wonder that the sinless Son of God should have submitted to such a baptism as

his, a baptism accompanied with the acknowledgment of sin, and the profession of repentance, and which was the symbol of the removal of the polluting stains of guilt. But our Lord's words fall upon our ears as they did on those of John. "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." Firmly yet gently, authoritatively yet courteously, clothing the command in the form of a request, he carries it over the reluctance and remonstrance of the Baptist. "Suffer it to be so now," for this once, so long as the present transient earthly relationship between us subsists. Suffer it, "for so it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." It is not then as a violator but as a fulfiller of the law that Jesus comes to be baptized; not as one who confesses to the want of such a perfect righteousness as might be presented for acceptance to God, but as one prepared to meet every requirement of his Father, and to render to it an exact and complete obedience. Who could speak thus, as if it were such an easy, as well as such a becoming thing in him to fulfill all righteousness, but the only begotten of the Father, he who, in coming into this world could say, Lo! I come to do thy will, O God?

And here, in subjecting himself to the baptism of John, you have the first instance of Christ's acting in his public official character as the Messiah. He steps forth at last from his long retirement, his deep seclusion at Nazareth, to appear how? to do what?—to appear as an inferior before the Baptist, to ask a service at his hands, to enroll himself as one of his disciples; for this was the primary purpose of this ordinance. It was the initiatory rite by which repentant Israelites enrolled themselves as the hopeful expectants of the coming kingdom; and He, the head of that kingdom, stoops to enroll himself in this way among them. “By one spirit,” says the apostle, “we are all baptized into one body;” the outward baptism the sign or symbol of our incorporation into that one body the Church. In the same way the Lord himself enters into that body, honors the ordinance which God had sent John to administer, conforms even to that preparatory and temporary economy through which his Infant Church was called to pass, putting himself under the law, making himself in all things like unto his brethren.

Still, however, the difficulty returns upon us, as to what meaning such a rite as that of

John's baptism could have in the case of Jesus ; sin he had none to confess, nor penitence to feel, nor reformation to effect, nor a faith in the One to come to cherish. Yet his baptism in the Jordan was not without meaning ; nay, its singular significance reveals itself as we contemplate the sinlessness of his character. We rightly regard the baptism of Jesus as the first act of his public ministry : and does he not present himself at the very outset in that peculiar character and office which he sustains throughout his mediatorial work, identifying himself with his people as their representative and their head ; taking on him their sins, numbering himself with transgressors—doing now, enduring afterwards what it became them as sinners to do, as sinners to suffer ? In himself he was pure and undefiled, having no stain whose removal this outward baptism with water might symbolize ; but even as an Israelite of old, though personally pure, might become ceremonially unclean by simple contact with the dead, and as such had to go through the required ablution, so by his close contact with our spiritually dead humanity, might the Son of Man be considered as defiled, and thus require to pass through the waters of

baptism under the hand of John. And even as the high priest of old, though not a stain was on his body, had to wash it all over with pure water before he put on those holy and beautiful garments, clad with which he entered within the veil into the Holy of Holies ; even so did the holy Jesus, whilst here without the camp, a bearer of our reproach, consent to pass through those baptismal waters, as a step in his preparation for entering into the true Holy of Holies, and putting on there those holy and beautiful garments, the garments of that glory with which his consecrated, exalted, enthroned humanity is invested.

But let us now fix our eye on what happened immediately after the baptism of Christ. He came up straightway out of the water. He did not wait, as the Jews asked the proselyte to do, to listen to still further instruction out of the law ;—instruction likely to be the more deeply impressed by the time and circumstances under which it was given. He did not wait, as we are led, from the very expression employed here, to believe that many of those did who received the baptism from John. In him there was no need for such delay or any such instruction. The law of his God,

was it not written wholly, deeply, indelibly, in his heart? Straightway, therefore, he goes forth from under the Baptist's hands. John's wondering eye is on him as he ascends the river banks. There he throws himself into the attitude, engages in the exercise of prayer, and then it is, as with uplifted hands he gazes into the heavens, that he sees them opened above his head, the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting on him, and a voice from heaven saying to him, "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

The requirements of the narrative, as given by St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke, do not involve us in the belief that the bystanders generally, if present in any numbers, saw these sights and heard that voice. Its being so distinctly specified by each of the Evangelists that it was He who saw and heard, would rather lead us to the inference that the sight and the hearing were confined to our Lord alone. John, indeed, tells us that he saw the vision, and we may believe therefore that he also heard the voice, but beyond the two, who may have been standing apart and by themselves, it would not seem that the wonders of this incident were at the time revealed. Other

instances of like manifestations had this feature attached to them, that were revealed to those whose organs were opened, and allowed to take them in, and were hidden from those around. Stephen saw the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. The clamorous crowd about him did not see as he did. Had the vision burst upon their eyes, it would have awed their tumultuous rage to rest. When Saul was struck down on his way to Damascus, his companions saw indeed a light and heard some sounds, but they neither saw the person of the Saviour nor distinguished the words he spoke, though, in one sense, in a much fitter condition to do so than Saul was. It is said of the disciples on the day of Pentecost, that there appeared unto them tongues as of fire which rested on the head of each ; it is not likely that these were seen by those who mocked.

But be it as it may as to the other spectators and auditors, it is evident that these supernatural appearances gave to the baptism of Jesus a new character in the Baptist's eyes, as they should do in ours. In the descending dove, outward emblem of the descending Spirit, he not only saw the pre-appointed to-

ken that the greater than he who was to baptize with the Holy Ghost was before him, but in the whole incident he beheld the first great step in our Lord's public and official life : the setting of him openly apart as the Lamb for the sacrifice ; his consecration to, and his qualification for, the great office of the one and only High Priest over the House of God. The Levitical law required that the priesthood should be inaugurated with washing and anointing. Eight days were occupied (as we read in the 8th chapter of Leviticus) in the various imposing services of that original ceremonial, by which the family of Aaron was for ever set apart to the priestly office. It was now on the banks of the Jordan that a greater than Aaron was set apart for a higher than earthly priesthood. There was little about this consecration externally imposing, but the want was well supplied. No gorgeous temple, no brazen laver, but in their stead the pure waters of the running stream below, and the vast blue vault of heaven above ; no holy and beautiful garments, the raiment of rich material, and fine needlework, but in their stead the spotless robe with which the fulfiller of all righteousness was clad ; no chrysm, no costly

sacred oil to pour upon the new priest's head, but in its stead the anointing with the Holy Ghost.

As Jesus stepped forth after the baptism on the banks of the river, he stood severed from the past, connected with a new future ; Nazareth, its quiet home, its happy days, its peaceful occupations, lay behind ; trials and toils, and suffering and death, lay before him. He would not have been the Son of man had he not felt the significance and solemnity of the hour ; he would not have been the full partaker of our human nature had the weight of his new position, new duties, new trials, not pressed heavily upon his heart. He turns, in the pure, true instinct of his sinless humanity, to seek support and strength in God, to throw himself and all his future upon his Father in prayer. But who may tell us how he felt, and what he prayed ; what desires, what hopes, what solitudes went up from the heart, at least, if not from the lips, of this extraordinary suppliant ! Never before had the throne of the heavenly Grace been thus approached, and never before was such answer given. The prayer ascends direct from earth to heaven, and brings the immediate answer down. It is

as he prays, that the Spirit comes, bringing light, and strength, and comfort to the Saviour, sustaining him under that consciousness of his Sonship to God, which now fills, expands, exalts his weak humanity. And does not our great Head and Representative stand before us here a type and pattern of every true believer in the Lord as to the duty, the privilege, the power of prayer? Of him, and of him only of the sons of men, might it be said that he prayed without ceasing; that his life was one of constant and sustained communion with his Father; and yet you find him on all the great occasions of his life having recourse to separate, solitary, sometimes to prolonged acts of devotion. His baptism, his appointment of the twelve apostles, his escape from the attempt to make him a king, his transfiguration, his agony in the garden, his death upon the cross, were all hallowed by prayer. The first and the last acts of his ministry were acts of prayer: from the lowest depth, from the highest elevation of that ministry, he poured out his spirit in prayer. For his mission on earth, for all his heaviest trials, he prepared himself by prayer. And should we not prepare for our poor earthly service, and fortify ourselves against tempta-

tions and trials, by following that great example? The heavens above are not shut up against us; the Spirit who descended like a dove has not taken wings and flown away for ever from this earth. There is a power by which these heavens can still be penetrated, which can still bring down upon us that gentle messenger of rest,—the power that lies in simple, humble, earnest, continued believing prayer.

The Holy Spirit as he descended upon Jesus was pleased to assume the form and gentle motion of a dove gliding down from the skies. He came not now as a rushing mighty wind. He sat not on Jesus as a cloven tongue of fire. It was right that when he came to do the work of quick and strong conviction, necessary in converting the souls of men, to bestow those gifts by which the first missionaries of the cross should be qualified for prosecuting that work, the rush as of a whirlwind should sweep through the room in which the disciples were assembled, and the cloven tongues of fire should come down and rest upon their heads. But the visitation of the Spirit to the Saviour was for an altogether different purpose, and it could not be more fitly represented than by the

meek-eyed dove, the chosen symbol of gentleness and affection. The eagle with its wing of power, its eye of fire, its beak of terror, was the bird of Jove. The dove the bird of Jesus. To him the Spirit came not, as in dealing with the souls of men, to bring light out of darkness, order out of confusion ; but to point out, as the Saviour of the world, the meek and the lowly, the gentle and the loving Jesus.

But was no ulterior purpose served by the descent of the Spirit on this occasion? We touch a mystery here we cannot solve, and need not try to penetrate. The sinless humanity of Jesus was brought into intimate and everlasting union with the divine nature of the Son of God, doubly secured as we should say from sin, and fully qualified for all the Messianic service, and yet we are taught that that humanity was impregnated and fitted for its work by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He was born of the Holy Ghost. He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. In the synagogue of Nazareth, where he had first opened his lips as a public teacher, there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah : he read the words, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ; and having read the passage out, he closed the

book, and said, This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears. John testified of him saying: "He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God, for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him." Jesus said of himself: "If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then is the kingdom of God come unto you." God sent Peter to Cornelius in opening the kingdom to the Gentiles. "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power." It was through the eternal Spirit that he offered himself without spot to God (Heb. ix. 14). He was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead (Rom. i. 4). It was through the Holy Ghost that he gave commandments to the apostles whom he had chosen, until the day in which he was taken up (Acts i. 2). So it is that through every stage of his career the Spirit is with him, qualifying him for every work, why or how, he alone could tell us who could lift that veil which shrouds the innermost recesses of the Spirit of the Incarnate Son of God.

As the Spirit lighted upon Jesus, there came to him a voice from heaven. This voice was twice heard again;—on the Mount of Trans-

figuration, and within the Temple. It was the voice of the Father. No man, since the fall of our first parent, had ever heard that voice before, as no man has ever heard it since. The fall sealed the Father's lips in silence ; all divine communications afterwards with man were made through the Son. It was he who appeared and spake to the patriarchs ; it was he who spake from the summit of Sinai, and was the giver of the law ; but now for the first time the Father's lips are opened, the long-kept silence is broken, that this testimony of the Father to the Sonship of Jesus, this expression of his entire good pleasure with him as he enters upon his ministry, may be given. That testimony and expression of approval were repeated afterwards in the very same words at the transfiguration ; the words indeed on that occasion were spoken not to, but of Jesus, and addressed to the disciples ; and so with a latent reference perhaps to Moses and Elias, the Father said to them : " This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased : hear ye him." But at the baptism St. Mark and St. Luke agree in stating that the words were spoken not of, but directly to Christ himself. Primarily and eminently it may have been for

Christ's own sake that the words were upon this occasion spoken ; and as we contemplate them in this light, we feel that no thought can fathom their import, nor gauge what fullness of joy and strength they may have carried into the bosom of our Lord. But here too there is a veil which we must not try to lift. Instead of thinking then what meaning or power this assurance of his Sonship, and of the Father's full complacency in him, may have had for Christ, let us take it as opening to our view the one and only way of our adoption and acceptance by the Father, even by our being so well pleased in all things with Christ, our having such simple, implicit faith in him that the Father looking upon us as one with him, becomes also well pleased with us.

IX.

THE TEMPTATION.*

SATAN was suffered to succeed in his temptation of our first parents. His success may for the moment have seemed to him complete, secure ; for did not the sentence run, “In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die?” And did not that sentence come from One whose steadfast truthfulness—dispute it as he might in words with Eve—none knew better than himself? Having once then got man to sin, he might have fancied that he had broken for ever the tie that bound earth to heaven, that he had armed against the first inhabitants of our globe the same resistless might, and the same unyielding justice by which he and the partners of the first revolt in heaven had been driven away

* Matthew iv. 1-11 ; Mark i. 12, 13 ; Luke iv. 1-13.

into their dark and ignominious prison-house. But if such a hope had place for a season in the tempter's breast, it must surely have given way when, summoned together with his victims into the divine presence, the Lord God said to him : " I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed ; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Obscure as these words may at the time have seemed, yet must they have taught Satan to know that his empire over this new-formed world was neither to be an undisputed nor an undivided one. An enmity of some kind between his seed and the woman's seed was to arise ; no mere temporary irritation and insubordination on the part of his new subjects, but an enmity which would prove fatal to himself and to his kingdom, the final advantage in the predicted warfare being all against him, for while he was to bruise the heel of his enemy, that enemy was to bruise his head, to crush his power.

It could not therefore have been with a sense of security free from uneasy anticipations, that from the days of the first Adam down to the birth of the second, the God of this world held his empire over our earth. His dominion was

the dominion of sin and death, and his triumph might seem complete, none of all our race being found who could keep himself from sin ; whilst every one that sinned had died. But were there no checks to the exercise of his power, nothing to inspire him with alarm ? Had not Enoch and Elijah passed away from the world without tasting death ? And must it not have appeared to him an inscrutable mystery that so many human spirits escaped at death, altogether from beneath his sway ? There were those prophecies, besides, delivered in Judea, of which he could not be ignorant, getting clearer and clearer as they grew in number, speaking of the advent of a great deliverer of the race ; there were those Jewish ceremonies prefiguring some great event disastrous to his reign ; there was the whole history and government of that wonderful people, the seed of Israel, guided by another hand than his, and regulated with a hostile purpose.

All this must have awakened dark forebodings within Satan's breast ; forebodings stirred into a heightened terror when one of the woman's seed at last appeared, who, for thirty years, with perfect ease, apparently without a struggle, resisted all the seductions by which

his brethren of mankind had been led into sin. The visit of Gabriel to Nazareth, the angelic salutations, the angels that appeared and the hymns that floated over the hills of Bethlehem, the adoration of the shepherds, the worship of the wise men, the prophecies of the Temple—all these, let us believe, were known to the great adversary of our race ; but not one nor all of them together excited in him such wonder or alarm as this simple fact, that here at last was one who stood absolutely stainless in the midst of the world's manifold pollutions. So long however, as Jesus lived quietly and obscurely at Nazareth he might be permitted to enjoy his solitary triumph undisturbed, but his baptism in the Jordan brings him out from his retreat. This voice from heaven, a voice that neither man nor devil had ever heard before, resounding through the opened skies, proclaims Him to be more than a son of man—to be, in very deed, the Son of God. Who can this mysterious being be?—an alien and an enemy, Satan has counted him from his youth. But his Sonship to God ! What can that imply ; how is it to be manifested ? The time has come for putting him to extreme trial, and, if he may not be personally overcome, for forc-

ing him to disclose his character at the commencement of his career.

The opportunity for making the attempt is given. "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." It was not, we may believe, under anything like compulsion, outward or inward, that Jesus acted when immediately after his baptism he retired to the desert. Between the promptings of the Spirit of God and the movements of Christ there ever must have been the most entire consent and harmony. Why, then, so instantly after his public inauguration to his earthly work, is there this voluntary retirement of our Lord, this hiding of himself in lonely solitudes? Accepting here the statement of the Evangelist, that it was to furnish the Prince of Darkness with the fit opportunity of assaulting him, may we not believe that these forty days in the wilderness without food served some other ends besides—did for our Lord in his higher vocation what the forty days of fasting did for Moses and Elijah in their lesser prophetic office; that they were days of preparation, meditation, prayer—a brief season interposed between the peaceful private life of Nazareth, and the public troubled life on which

he was about to enter, for the purpose of girding him up for the great task assigned to him—a season of such close, absorbing, elevating spiritual exercises that the spirit triumphed over the body, and for a time felt not even the need of daily food? It was not till these forty days were over that he was an-hungered, nor was it till hunger was felt that the tempter came in person to assault. The expressions used indeed by St. Mark and St. Luke appear to imply that the temptation ran through all the forty days; but if so, it must, in the first instance, have been of an inward and purely spiritual character, such as we can well conceive mingling with and shadowing those other exercises to which the days and nights of that long solitude and fasting were devoted.

And yet, though the holy spirit of our Lord prompted him to follow with willing footstep the leadings of the Holy Ghost, his true humanity may well have shrunk from what awaited him in the desert. He knew that he was there to come into close contact with, to meet in personal encounter the Head of that kingdom he was commissioned to overthrow; and, even as in the Garden human weakness sank tremblingly under the burden of immeasur-

able woe, so here it may have shrunk from such an interview and such a conflict, needing as it were to be urged by Divine compulsion, and thus authorizing the strong expression which St. Mark employs, "Immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness." It may in fact have been no small part of that trial which ran through the forty days that he had continually before him, the approach and the encounter with the Prince of Darkness.

Whatever that state of his spirit was which rendered him insensible to the cravings of hunger, it terminates with the close of the forty days. The inward supports that had borne him up during that rapt ecstatic condition are removed. He sinks back into a natural condition. The common bodily sensations begin to be experienced; a strong craving for food is felt. Now, then, is the moment for the tempter to make his first assault upon the Holy One, as weak, famished, the hunger of his long fast gnawing at his heart, he wanders with the wild beasts as his sole companions over the frightful solitudes. Coming upon him abruptly, he says to Jesus, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." The words of the re-

cent baptismal scene at the Jordan are yet ringing in Satan's ears. He knows not what to make of them. He would fain believe them false ; or better still, he would fain prove them false by prevailing upon Christ himself to doubt their truth. For, for him to doubt his Father's word would be virtually to renounce, disprove his Sonship. Even then, as by his artful insidious speech to the woman in the garden—Yea, has God said, In the day thou eatest thou shalt die?—he sought to insinuate a secret doubt of the divine truthfulness and divine goodness, so here, into the bosom of Jesus in the wilderness, he seeks to infuse a kindred doubt.

‘ If thou be really the Son of God, as I have so lately heard thee called. But canst thou be? can it be here, and thus—alone in these desert places, foodless, companionless, comfortless, for so many days—that God would leave or trust his Son? But if thou wilt not doubt that thou art his Son, surely God could never mean nor wish that his Son should continue in such a state as this? If thou be truly what thou hast been called, then all power must be thine ; whatsoever things the Father doeth, thou too must be able to do. Show,

then, thy Sonship, exert thy power, relieve thyself from this pressing hunger ; “command that these stones be made bread.”’ The temptation here is twofold : to shake if possible Christ’s confidence in Him who had brought him into such a condition of extreme need, and to induce him, under the influence of that distrust, to exert at once his own power to deliver himself, to work a miracle to provide himself with food. The temptation is at once repelled, not by any assertion of his Sonship, or of his abiding trust in God, in opposition to the insidious doubt suggested,—for that doubt the Saviour never cherished ; the shaft that carried this doubt in it, though artfully contrived and skillfully directed, glanced innocuous from the mind of that confiding Son, who was ever as well pleased with the Father, as the Father had declared himself to be with him.

Nor was the temptation repelled by any such counter argument as that it was inadmissible to exert his Divine power merely for his own benefit ; but by a simple quotation from the book of Deuteronomy : “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth

of God." Jesus waives thus all question about his being the Son of God, or how it behoved him in that character to act. He takes his place as a son of man, and lays his hand upon an incident in the history of the children of Israel, who, led out into the wilderness, and continuing as destitute of common food for forty years as he had been for forty days, received in due time the manna provided for them by God, who said to them afterwards, by the lips of Moses : " The Lord thy God humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." It was by the word of the Lord's creative power that for those hungry Israelites the manna was provided ; that word went forth at the Lord's own time, and to meet his people's wants in the Lord's own way ; and upon that word, that is, upon Him whose word it was, Jesus, when now like the Israelites an-hungered in the wilderness, will rely. It is not necessary for him to turn stones into bread in order to sustain his life ; other kind of food his Father, if he so pleased, could provide, and he will leave him to do as he pleases.

From that entire dependence on his Father, to which in his present circumstances, and under that Father's guidance, he had been shut up, he had no desire to be relieved—would certainly do nothing prematurely to relieve himself, and least of all at Satan's bidding would use the higher, the divine faculty that was in him, as a mere instrument of self-gratification. It was in the same spirit of self-denial, that ever afterwards he acted. Those who taunted him on the cross, by saying, "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross," knew not how exact an echo their speech at Calvary was of Satan's speech in the wilderness,—how thoroughly they were proving their parentage, as being of their father the Devil. But Jesus would do neither as Satan nor these his children bade him. His power divine was given him to execute the great office of our spiritual deliverer: his way to the execution of his office lay through trial, suffering, and death, and he would not call that power in to save him from any part of the required endurance; neither from the hunger of the wilderness, nor from any of the far heavier loads he had afterwards to bear.

Foiled in his first attempt, accepting but

profiting by his defeat, the artful adversary at once reverses his method, and assaults the Saviour precisely on the other side. He has tried to shake Christ's trust in his Father ; he has failed ; that trust seems only to gather strength the more severely it is proved ; he will work now upon that very trust, and try to press it into presumption. "Then the Devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the Temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down." 'I acknowledge that you have been right in the wilderness, that you have acted as a true Son of the Father. You have given, in fact, no mean proof of your entire confidence in him as your Father, in standing there in the extremity of hunger, and virtually saying, I am here by the will of God, here he can and he will provide, I leave all to him. But come, I ask you now to make another and still more striking display of your dependence in all possible conjunctures on the Divine aid. Show me, and all those worshippers in the court below, how far this faith of yours in your Father will carry you. Do now, what in the sight of all will prove you to be the very one the Jews are looking for. If thou be the Son of God,

then, as we shall presume thou art, cast thyself down ; the God who sustained thy body without food in the wilderness, can surely sustain it as you fling yourself into the yielding air ; the people who are longing to see some wonder done by their expected Messiah, will hail you as such at once, when they see you, instead of being dashed to pieces, floating down at their feet as gently as a dove, and alighting in the midst of them. Give to me and them this proof of the greatness of your faith, the reality of your Sonship to God ; and if you want a warrant for the act in those Scriptures which you have already quoted, remember what is written in one of those ancient Psalms, a psalm that the wise men say relates to you : “ He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.” ’

As promptly as before the Lord replies : “ It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.” Here again, there is no attempt at argument, no correction of the quotation which the tempter had made, no reminding him that, in quoting, he had omitted one essential clause, “ He shall keep thee in all

thy ways," the ways of his appointment, not of thine own fashioning. The one Scripture is simply met by the other, and left to be interpreted thereby. "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." To trust was one thing, to tempt another. Jesus would rely to the very uttermost upon the Divine faithfulness, upon God's promised care and help; but he would not put that faithfulness to a needless trial. If put by the Devil in a position of difficulty and danger, he will cherish an unbounded trust in God, and if extrication from that position be desirable, and no other way of effecting it be left, he will even believe that God will miraculously interpose in his behalf. But he will not of his own accord, without any proper call or invitation, for no other purpose than to make an experiment of the Father's willingness to aid him, to make a show of the kind of heavenly protection he could claim; he will not voluntarily place himself in such a position. He was here on the pinnacle of the Temple, from that pinnacle there was another open, easy, safe method of descent; why should he refuse to take it if he desired to descend; why fling himself into open space? If he did so unasked, unordered by God him-

self, what warrant could he have that the Divine power would be put forth to bear him up? God had indeed promised to bear him up, but he had not bidden him cast himself down, for no other purpose than to see whether he would be borne up or not; to do what Satan wished him to do, would be to show not the strength of his faith, but the extent of his presumption. Thus once again by that sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, is the second thrust of the adversary turned aside.

These first two temptations, whilst opposite in character have yet much that is common to both. The preface to each of them is the same: "If thou be the Son of God,"—a preface obviously suggested by the recent testimony at the baptism. They have also the common object of probing to the bottom, and thus trying to ascertain, the powers and privileges which this Sonship to God conferred. There was curiosity as well as malice in the double effort to do so, and the subtlety of their method lay in this, that they were so constructed that had Christ yielded to either, in the very disclosure of his Godhead, there had been an abuse of its power. Had Jesus taken the Devil's way of proving his strength, he would have

taken the very way to have broken it. In those first two temptations, Satan had spoken nothing of himself, had revealed nothing of his purposes ; but balked in them he now drops the mask, appears in his own person, and boldly claims homage from Christ : " Again, the Devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them ; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." Had it been upon the actual summit of the Temple at Jerusalem that Jesus previously had been placed, and if so, how was his conveyance thither effected ? was it upon the actual summit of some earthly mountain that the feet of our Saviour were now planted, and if so, how was it, how could it be that all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them were brought before his eye ? We have no answer to give to those questions ; we care not to speculate as to the outward mode in which each temptation was managed. We are willing to believe anything as to the accessories of this narrative which leave untouched its truthfulness as a historic record of an actual and personal encounter between the Prince of Darkness and

the Prince of Light. That the gospel narrative is such a record, we undoubtedly believe, and are strengthened in our faith as we perceive not only the suitableness and the subtlety of each individual temptation, as addressed to the humanity of our Lord, assaulting it in the only quarters in which it lay open to assault ; but the comprehensiveness of the whole temptation, as exemplifying those classes of temptations by which humanity at large, by which each of us, individually, is seduced from the path of true obedience unto God. The body, soul, and spirit of our Lord were each in turn invaded ; by the lust of the flesh, by the lust of the eyes, by the pride of life, it was attempted to draw him away from his allegiance. The first temptation was built upon bodily appetite, the hunger of the long fast ; the second, upon the love of ostentation, the desire we all have to show to the uttermost in what favor we stand with God or men ; the third, upon ambition, the love of earthly, outward power and glory.

The third had, however, a special adaptation to Christ's personal character and position at the time, and this very adaptation lent to it peculiar strength, making it, as it was the last,

so also the most insidious, the most alluring of the three. Jesus knew the ancient prophecies about a universal monarchy that was to be set up in the days of Messiah the Prince. From the days of his childhood, when in the Temple he had sat among the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions, the sacred volume which contained these prophecies had been in his hands. Who shall tell us with what interest, with what wonder, with what self-application these prophecies were pondered by him in the days of his youth, during which he grew in wisdom as he grew in years? Who shall tell us how soon or how fully he attained the sublime consciousness that he was himself the Messiah of whom that volume spake? Whatever may have been his earlier experience, at the time at least when the attestation at his baptism was given, that consciousness filled and pervaded his spirit. But he fell not into the general delusion which, in its desire for a conquering and victorious prince, lost sight of a suffering, dying Redeemer. He knew full well that the path marked out for him as the Saviour of mankind lay through profoundest sorrow, and would end in agonizing death. How much of all this Satan knew, it would be

presumptuous to conjecture. This, however, we are assured, that he knew—for he had heard and could quote the ancient prophecies which pointed to it—he knew about a monarchy that in the last days the God of heaven was to set up, which was to overturn his own, which was to embrace all the kingdoms of the world, and into which all the glory of these kingdoms was to be brought. And he may, we might almost say, he must have known beforehand of the toil, and strife, and hard endurance through which the throne of that monarchy was to be reached by his great rival.

And now that rival is before him, just entering upon his career. Upon that rival he will make a bold attempt. He will show him all those kingdoms that have been so long under his dominion as the God of this world. He will offer them all to him at once, without a single blow being struck, a single peril encountered, a single suffering endured. He will save him all that conflict which, if not doubtful in the issue, was to be so painful in its progress. He will lay down his sceptre, and suffer Jesus to take it up. In one great gift he will make over his whole right of empire over these kingdoms of the world to Christ, suffer him at once

to enter upon possession of them, and clothe himself with all their glory. This is his glittering bribe, and all he asks in return is that Jesus shall do him homage, as the superior by whom the splendid fief was given, and under whom it is held.

A bold and blasphemous attempt, for who gave him those kingdoms thus to give away? And how could he imagine that Jesus was open to a bribe, or would ever bow the knee to him? Let us remember, however, that we all judge others by ourselves; that there are those who think that every man has his price; that, make the bribe but large enough, and any man may be bought. And at the head of such thinkers is Satan. He judged Jesus by himself. And even as through lust of government he, archangel though he was, had not hesitated to withdraw his worship from the Supreme, so may he have thought that, taken unawares, even the Son of God himself might have fallen before the dazzling temptation. Had he done so, Satan would indeed have triumphed; for putting wholly out of the question the violated relationship to the Father, Jesus would thus have renounced all the purely moral and religious purposes of his mission—would have

ceased to be regarded as the author of a spiritual revolution, and the founder of a spiritual kingdom, affecting myriads of human spirits from the beginning to the end of time, and would thenceforth have taken up the character of a mere vulgar earthly monarch.

But Satan knew not with whom he had to do. The eye of Jesus may for a moment have been dazzled by the offer made, and this implied neither imperfection nor sin, but it refused to rest upon the seducing spectacle. It turned quickly and resolutely away. No sooner is the bribe offered than it is repelled. In haste, as if that magnificent panorama was not one on which even his pure eye should be suffered to repose ; as if this temptation were one which even he could not afford to dally with ; in anger too at the base condition coupled with the bribe, and as if he who offered it could no longer be suffered to remain in his presence, he calls the Devil by his name, and says : “ Get thee hence, Satan ; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.” Satan had wanted Jesus to give him some proof of his Divine power, and now he gets it ; gets it as that command is given which he must instantly obey. At once all

that glittering illusion that he had conjured up vanishes from the view. At once his hateful presence is withdrawn, the conflict is over, the victory is complete. Jesus stands once more alone in the wilderness, but he is not left alone. Angels come and minister unto him, gazing with wonder on that mysterious man who has entered into this solitary conflict with the head of the principalities and powers of darkness, and foiled him at every point.

But how are we to look upon this mysterious passage in the life of Christ? Are we to read the record of it as we would the story of a duel between two great chiefs, under neither of whom we shall ever have to serve, in the mode and tactics of whose warfare we have consequently but little interest? The very reverse. He who appeared that day in the wilderness before Jesus, and by so many wily acts strove to rob him of his integrity as a Son of the Father, goeth about still as the arch-enemy of our souls, seeking whom he may devour. His power over us is not weakened, though it failed on Christ. His malice against us is not lessened, though it was impotent when tried on him. The time, the person, the circumstances, all bestowed an undoubted

peculiarity upon these temptations of the wilderness, the Temple, and the mountain-top. We may be very sure that by temptations the same in outward form no other human being shall ever be assailed. But setting aside all that was special in them, let us lay our hand on the radical and essential principle of each of these three temptations, that we may see whether each of us is not still personally exposed to it.

In the first instance, Christ, when under the pressure of one of the most urgent appetites of our nature, is tempted to use a power that he got for other purposes, to minister to his own gratification. He is tempted, in fact, to use unlawful means to procure food. Is that a rare temptation? Not to speak here of those poor unfortunates who, under a like pressure, are tempted to put forth their hands to what is not their own, what shall we say of the merchant whom, in the brightest season of his prosperity, some sore and unexpected calamity overtakes? Through some reckless speculation, he sees the gay vision of his hopes give way and utter ruin stand before him but a few days off. The dismal picture of a family accustomed to wealth plunged into poverty already haunts his eye

and rends his heart. But a short respite still is given. Those around him are ignorant how he stands, his credit still is good, confidence in him is still unbroken. He can use that credit, he can employ the facilities which that confidence still gives. He dishonorably does so ; with stealthy hand he places a portion of his fortune beyond the reach of his future creditors to keep it for his family's use. That man meets and falls under the very same temptation with which our Lord and Master was assailed. Distrusting God, he uses the powers and opportunities given him, unrighteously and for selfish ends. He forgets that man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

Or what again shall we say of him who, fairly committed to the faith of Christ, and embarked in the great effort of overcoming all that is evil in his evil nature, plunges, with scarce a thought, into scenes and amid temptations such that it would need a miracle to bring him forth unscathed? That man meets and falls under the very same temptation with which our Saviour was assailed, when the Devil said, Cast thyself down, and quoted the promise of Divine support. Many and most pre-

cious indeed are the promises of Divine protection and support given us in the Word of God, but they are not for us to rest on if recklessly and needlessly we rush into danger, crossing any of the common laws of nature, or trampling the dictates of ordinary prudence and the lesson of universal experience beneath our feet. It is not faith, it is presumption which does so.

It might seem that we could find no actual parallel to the last temptation of our Lord, but in truth it is the one of all the three that is most frequently presented. Thrones and kingdoms, and all their glory, are not held out to us, but the wealth and the distinctions, the honors and the pleasures of life,—these in different forms, in different degrees, ply with their solicitations all of us in every rank from the highest to the lowest, tempting us away from God to worship and serve the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for evermore. A spectacle not so wide, less gorgeous in its coloring, but as sensuous, as illusive as that presented to Jesus on the mountain-top, the arch-deceiver spreads out before our eyes, whispering to our hearts, “All this will I give you ;” all this money, all that ease, all that pleasure, all

that rank, all that power, but in saying so he deals with us more treacherously than he dealt with Christ of old. With him he boldly and broadly laid it down as the condition of the grant, that Christ should fall down and worship him. He asks from us no bending of the knee, no act of outward worship ; all he asks is, that we believe his false promises, and turn away from God and Christ to give ourselves up to worldliness of heart and habit and pursuit. If we do so he is indifferent how we now think or act toward himself personally, for this is one of the worst peculiarities of that kingdom of darkness over which he presides, that its ruler knows no better subjects than those who deny his very being, and disown his rule.

But if it be to the very same temptations as those which beset our divine Lord and Master, that we are still exposed, let us be grateful to him for teaching us how to overcome them. He used throughout a single weapon. He had the whole armory of heaven at his command ; but he chose only one instrument of defence, the Word, the written Word, that sword of the Spirit. It was it that he so successfully employed. Why this exclusive use of an old weapon ? He did not need to have recourse

to it. A word of his own spoken would have had as much power as a written one quoted ; but then the lesson of his example had been lost to us—the evidence that he himself has left behind of the power over temptation that lies in the written word. Knowing, then, that you wrestle not with the flesh and blood alone, but with angels and principalities, and powers, and with him the head of all, of whose devices it becomes you not to be ignorant, take unto you the whole armor of God, for all is needed ; but remember, of all the pieces of which that panoply is composed, the last that is put into the hand of the Christian soldier by the great Captain of his salvation—put into his hand as the one that he himself, on the great occasion of his conflict with the Devil, used—put into his hand as the most effective and the only one that serves at once for defence and for assault—is the sword of the Spirit, and the Word of God. By it all other parts of the armor are guarded. The helmet might be shattered on the brow, the shield wrenched from the arm, did it not protect ; for hope and faith, that helmet and that shield, on what do they rest, but upon the Word of the living God ? When the tempter comes, then,

and plies you with his manifold and strong solicitations, be ready to meet him, as Jesus met him in the wilderness, and you shall thus come to know how true is that saying of David: "By the words of thy lips I have kept me from the path of the destroyer."

X.

THE FIRST DISCIPLES.*

FROM the forty days in the desert, from the long fast, from the triple assault, from the great victory won, from the companionship of the ministering angels, Jesus returns to the banks of Jordan, and mingles unnoticed and unknown, among the disciples of the Baptist. On the day of his return, a deputation from the Sanhedrim in Jerusalem arrives, to institute a formal and authoritative inquiry into the character and claims of the great preacher of repentance. John's answers to the questions put by these deputies, are chiefly negative in their character. He is not the Christ; he is not Elijah risen from the dead, neither is he that prophet, by whom, as they imagined, Elijah was to be accompanied; who

* John i. 29-51.

he is he would not say, however pointedly interrogated. But what he is, he so far informs them as to quote and apply to himself the passage from the prophecies of Isaiah, which spake of a voice crying in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." Challenged as to his right to baptize, if he is not that Christ, nor Elias, nor that prophet, John can now speak as he had not been able to do previously. Hitherto he had spoken indeterminately of one whom he knew not, the greater than he, who was to come after him; but now the sign from heaven had been given, the Spirit had been seen descending and abiding on Jesus. From the day of his baptism Jesus had withdrawn. John knew not whither, but now he sees him in the crowd, and says: "I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; he it is, who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose."

Having got so little to satisfy them as to who the Baptist was, it does not seem that the deputies from Jerusalem troubled themselves to make any inquiries as to who this other and greater than John was. Nor was it otherwise

with the multitude. Though the words of the Baptist, so publicly spoken, were such as might well awaken curiosity, the day passed, and Jesus remained unknown, assuming, saying, doing nothing by which he could be recognized. That John needed to point him out in order to recognition confirms our belief, derived in the first instance directly from the narrative itself, that at the baptism none but John and Jesus heard the voice from heaven, or saw the descending dove. Had the bystanders seen and heard these, among the disciples of John there would have been some ready at once to recognize Jesus on his return from the desert. But it is not so. Jesus remains hidden, and will not with his own hand lift the veil—will not bear any witness of himself—leaves it to another to do so.

But he must not continue thus unknown,—that were to frustrate the very end of all John's ministry. The next day, therefore, as John sees Jesus coming to him, whilst yet he is some way off, he points to him, and says: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me; for he was before me. And I knew

him not : but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water." "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not : but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God."

John's first public official testimony to Christ was, as it seems to me, particularly remarkable, as containing no reference whatever to that character or office in which the mass of the Jewish people might have been willing enough to recognize him, but confined to those two attributes of his person and work which they so resolutely rejected. There is no mention here of Jesus as Messiah, the Prince, the King of Israel. The record that John bears of him is, that he is the Son of God, the Lamb of God. He had lately heard the voice from heaven saying : "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." In giving him then this title, in calling him the Son of God, John was but re-echoing, as it were, the testimony of the

Father. Taught thus to use and to apply it, it may be fairly questioned, whether the Baptist in his first employment of it entered into the full significance of the term, as declarative of Christ's unity of nature with the Father. That in its highest, its only true sense indeed, it did carry with it such a meaning, and was understood to do so by those who knew best how to interpret it, appears in many a striking passage of the life of Jesus, and most conspicuously of all, in his trial and condemnation before the Jewish Sanhedrim. It was a title whose assumption by Jesus involved, in the apprehension of those who regarded him but as a man, nothing short of blasphemy. Such is the title here given to him by the Baptist. Whether he fully understood it or not, we can trace its adoption and employment to an obvious and natural source.

But that other title, the Lamb of God, and the description annexed to it, "who taketh away the sin of the world," how came the Baptist to apply these to Christ, and what did he mean by doing so? Here we cannot doubt that the same inner and divine teaching, which taught him in a passage of Isaiah's prophecies to see himself, taught him in another to see the

Saviour, and that it was from that passage in which the prophet speaks of the Messiah as a Lamb brought to the slaughter, as a sheep dumb before his shearers, that he borrowed the title now for the first time bestowed upon Jesus. From the same passage, too, he learned that the Anointed of the Lord was to be "wounded for our transgressions, to be bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was to be upon him, and with his stripes we are to be healed." Here in Jesus, John sees the greater than himself whose way he was to prepare before him, but that way he sees to be one leading him to suffering and to death ; his perhaps the only Jewish eye at that moment opened to discern the truth that it was through this suffering and this death that the spiritual victories of the great King were to be achieved, that it was upon them that his spiritual kingdom was to have its broad and deep foundations laid. John's baptism had hitherto been one of repentance for the remission of sins. This remission had been held out in prospect as the end to which repentance was to conduct ; but all about its source, its fullness, its certainty had been obscure,—obscure perhaps to John's own eyes, obscure at least in the

manner of his speaking about it ; but now he sees the Lamb of God, the suffering, dying Jesus, taking away by bearing it the sin of the world,—not taking away by subduing it the sinfulness of the world, that John could not have meant, this Jesus has not done,—but taking the world's sin away by taking it on himself, and expiring beneath its load, making the great atoning sacrifice, fulfilling all the types of the Jewish ceremonial, all that the paschal lamb, all that the lamb of the morning and evening sacrifice had been typifying.

In the two declarations then of John, “ This is the Son of God,” “ Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world,” you have in a form as distinct, as short and compendious as it is anywhere else to be found,—the gospel of the kingdom. The divine nature of the man Christ Jesus, the completeness and efficacy of the shedding of his blood, of the offering up of himself for the remission of sins, are they not here very simply and plainly set forth ? We are not asked to believe that the Baptist himself understood his own testimony to Christ, as with the light thrown on it by the Epistles, and especially in this instance, by the Epistle to the Hebrews, we now understand it ;

but assuredly he understood so much of it as that he himself saw in Christ, and desired that others should see in him, the heaven-laid channel, opened up through his life and death, of that Divine mercy which covereth all the transgressions of every penitent believing soul.

How interesting to hear this gospel of the grace of God preached so early, so simply, so earnestly, so believingly by him whose office in all the earlier parts of his ministry was so purely moral, a call simply to repentance, to acts and deeds of justice, mercy, truth. But this was the issue to which all those preparatory instructions were to conduct. The law in the hands of John was to be a schoolmaster to guide at last to Christ ; and when the time for that guidance came, was it not with a sensation of relief, a bounding throb of exulting satisfaction, that—conscious of how impotent in themselves all his efforts were to get men to repent and reform, while the pardon of their sins was anxiously toiled after in the midst of perplexity and doubt, instead of being gratefully and joyfully accepted as God's free gift in Christ—the Baptist proclaimed to all around, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

Nor was he discouraged that his announcement met with no response that day from the crowd around, that still his voice was as the voice of one crying in a wilderness. The many who waited on his ministry, and partook of his baptism, came from curiosity, acted on a passing impulse, hoped that some new and better state of things socially and politically was to be ushered in by this strange child of the desert,—and had no deeper wants to be supplied, or spiritual longings to be satisfied. Quite strange—if not unmeaning, yet unwelcome—to their ears, this new utterance of the Baptist. It was not after the Lamb of God, not after one who was to take away their sins, that they were seeking. But there were others of a different mould, partakers of the spirit of Simeon and Anna, waiting for the consolation of Israel, for the coming of one to whom, whatever outward kingdom he was to set up, they mainly looked as their spiritual Lord and King, in the days of whose kingdom peace was to enter troubled consciences, and there should be rest for wearied hearts. The eyes of these waiters for the morning saw the first streaks of dawn in the ministry of the Baptist, and some of them had already enrolled themselves

as his disciples, attaching themselves permanently to his person.

The next day after he had given his first testimony to Christ's lamb-like and sacrificial character and office,—a testimony apparently so little heeded, attended at least with no outward and visible result,—John is standing with two of these disciples by his side. He will repeat to them the testimony of yesterday ; they had heard it already, but he will try whether it will not have another and more powerful effect when given not promiscuously to a general audience, but specifically to these two. Looking upon Jesus as he walked, he directed their attention to him, by simply saying once again, "Behold the LAMB OF GOD !"—leaving it to their memory to supply all about him which in the course of the two preceding days he had declared. Not now without effect. Neither of these two men may know as yet in what sense he is the Lamb of God, nor how by him their sin is to be taken away ; but both have felt their need of some one willing and able to guide their agitated hearts to a secure haven of rest, and they hope to find in him thus pointed out the one they need. They follow him. John restrains them not ; it is as

he would wish. Willingly, gladly, he sees them part from him to follow this new Master. He knows that they are putting themselves under a better, higher guidance than any which he can give. But who are these two men? One of them is Andrew, better known to us by his brotherhood to Simon. The other reveals himself by the very manner in which he draws the veil over his own name. He would not name himself, and by that very modesty which he displays he stands revealed. It is no other than that disciple whom Jesus loved ; no other than the writer of this Gospel, upon whose memory those days of his first acquaintance with Jesus had fixed themselves in the exact succession of their incidents so indelibly, that though he writes his narrative at least forty years after the death of Christ, he writes not only as an eye-witness, but as one who can tell day after day what happened, and no doubt the day was memorable to him, and the very hour of that day, on which he left the Baptist's side to join himself to Jesus.

John and Andrew follow Jesus. We wonder which of the two it was that made the first movement towards him. Let us believe it to have been John, that we may cherish the

thought that he was the first to follow as he was the last to leave. He was one at least of the first two men who became followers of the Lamb ; and that because of their having heard him described as the Lamb of God. When this first incident in his own connexion with Jesus is considered, need we wonder that this epithet "the Lamb" became so favorite a one with John ; that it is in his writings, and in them alone of all the writings of the New Testament, that it is to be found, occurring nearly thirty times in the book of the Apocalypse.

The two disciples follow Jesus, silently, respectfully, admiringly—anxious to address him, yet unwilling to obtrude. He relieves them from their embarrassment. The instinct of that love which is already drawing them to him, tells him that he is being followed for the first time by human footsteps, answering to warm-beating anxious human hearts. He turns and says to them, "What seek ye?" a vague and general question, which left it open to them to give any answer that they pleased, to connect their movement with him or not. But their true hearts speak out. It is not any short and hurried converse by the way that will satisfy their ardent longings. They would have hours

with him, days with him, alone in the seclusion of his home. "Rabbi,"—they say to him, the first time doubtless that Jesus was ever so addressed—"where dwellest thou? He saith to them, Come and see; and they came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour." If, in his Gospel, John numbers the hours of the day according to the Jewish method of computation, then it must have been late in the afternoon, at four o'clock, having but two hours of that day to run, that Christ's invitation was given and accepted. We incline to believe, however, that John follows not the Jewish but the Roman method of counting, and if so, then it was in the forenoon at ten o'clock that the two disciples accompanied our Lord. And we are the rather induced to believe so, as it gives room for the other incident, the bringing of Simon to Jesus, to happen during the same day, which, from the specific and journal-like character of this part of John's narrative, we can scarcely help conceiving that it did.

But where and whose was the abode to which Jesus conducted John and Andrew, and how were their hours employed? It could only have been some house which the

hospitality of strangers had opened for a few days' residence, to one whom they knew not, and over all the intercourse that took place beneath its roof the veil is drawn. It is the earliest instance this of that studied reserve as to all the minuter details of Christ's daily life and conversation upon which we may have afterwards to offer some remarks. John has not yet learned to lay his head on that Master's bosom, but already he is sitting at his feet. And there for all day long, and on into the quiet watches of the night, would he sit drinking in our Lord's first opening of his great message of mercy from the Father. Andrew has something of the restless active spirit of his brother in him, and so no sooner has he himself attained a sure conviction that this is indeed the Christ whom he has found, than he hurries out to seek his own brother Simon, and bring him to Jesus. We should have liked exceedingly to have been present at that interview, to have stood by as Jesus for the first time looked at Simon, and Simon for the first time fixed his eye on Jesus. The Lord looks upon Simon and sees all he is, and all that he is yet to be. His great confession, his three denials, his bitter repentance, his restoration,

the great services rendered, the death like that of his Master, he is to die, all are present to the thoughts of Jesus as he looks. "Thou art Simon," he says at once to him, as if he had known him from his youth—"Simon the son of Jona." This word Jona, in Hebrew, means a dove, and it has been thought, fancifully perhaps, that it was with a sidelong reference to the place of the dove's usual resort that Jesus said: "Thou art Simon the son of the dove, which seeks shelter in the rock; thou shalt be called Cephas, shalt be the rock for the dove to shelter in." On an after occasion Jesus explained more fully why it was that this new name of Peter, the Rock, was bestowed. Here we have nothing but the simple fact before us, that it was at the first meeting of the two, and before any converse whatever took place between them, that the change of name was announced; with what effect on Peter we are left to guess—his very silence, a silence rather strange to him, the only thing to tell us how deep was the impression made by this first interview with Christ.

The next day, the fifth from that on which this chronicling of the days begins, Jesus goes forth on his return to Galilee, finds Philip by the

way, and saith to him, "Follow me." Philip was of Bethsaida. Bethsaida lay at the northern extremity of the Sea of Galilee, not on the line of Christ's route from Bethabara to Nazareth or Cana. We infer from this circumstance, that, like John, Andrew, and Peter, Philip had left his home to attend on the ministry of the Baptist. On the banks of the Jordan, or afterwards from one or other of his Galilean countrymen, who had already joined themselves to Christ, he had learned the particulars of his earlier earthly history. Any difficulty that he might himself have had in recognizing the Messiahship of one so born and educated, was soon got over, the wonder at last enhancing the faith. Finding Nathanael, Philip said to him : "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." It was a very natural reply for one who lived so near to Nazareth, and knew how insignificant a place it was, to say : "Can there any good thing, any such good thing, come out of Nazareth?" Come and see, was Philip's answer. It proved the very simplicity and docility of Nathanael's nature, that he did at once go to see. Perhaps, however, his recent exercises had pre-

pared him for the movement. Before Philip called him, he had been under the fig-tree, the chosen place for meditation and prayer with the devout of Israel. There had he been pondering in his heart, wondering when the Hope of Israel was to come, and praying that it might be soon, when a friend comes and tells him that the very one that he has been praying for has appeared. With willing spirit he accompanies his friend. Before, however, he gets close to him, Jesus says, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile ! How much of that very guileless spirit which we have learned to call by his name is there in Nathanael's answer ! Without thinking that he is in fact accepting Christ's description of him as true, and so exposing himself to the charge of no small amount of arrogance, disproving in fact that charge by the very blindness that he shows to the expression of it, he says, " Whence knowest thou me ? " Our Lord's reply, " Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree I saw thee," we may regard as carrying more with it to the conscience and heart of Nathanael than the mere proof that Christ's eye saw what no human eye, placed as he was at the time, could have seen, but that the secrets of all hearts lay

open to him with whom he had now to do. Nathanael comes with doubting mind, but a guileless heart ; and so now, without dealing with it intellectually, the doubt is scattered by our Lord's quick glance penetrating into his inner spirit, and an instant and sure faith is at once planted in Nathanael's breast.

I am apt to think, from the very form of Nathanael's answer, from the occurrence in it of a phrase that does not seem to have been a Jewish synonym for the Messiah, that Nathanael too had been at the Jordan, and had heard there the testimony that John had borne to Jesus. Rabbi, he says, Thou art what I have lately heard thee called, and wondered at them calling thee,—
"Thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel." There was something so fresh, so fervent, so full-hearted in the words, they fell so pleasantly on the ear of Jesus, that a bright vision rose before his eye of the richer things that were yet in store for all that believed on him. First, he says to Nathanael individually, because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou ? thou shalt see greater things than these ;—and then looking on the others, whilst still addressing himself to him, he adds :—Verily, verily, I say unto you, Here-

after, or rather from this time forward, ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. You have heard, that a few weeks ago, on the banks of the river, the heavens opened for a moment above my head, and the Spirit was seen coming down like a dove upon me. That was but a sign. Believe what that sign was meant to confirm ; believe in me as the Lamb of God, the Saviour of the world, the baptizer with the Holy Ghost, and your eye of faith shall be quickened, and you shall see those heavens standing continually open above my head,—opened by me for you ; and the angels of God,—all beings and things that carry on the blessed ministry of reconciliation between earth and heaven, between the souls of believers below and the heavenly Father above,—going up and bringing blessings innumerable down, ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. Son of God,—my Father called me so at my baptism, the devil tempted me as such in the desert, the Baptist gave me that name at Bethabara, and thou, Nathanael, hast bestowed it upon me now once again ; but the name that I now like best, and shall oftenest call myself, is that of the Son of Man ; and yet I am both, and in being both

truly and eternally fulfill the dream of Bethel. It was but in a dream that your father Jacob saw that ladder set up on earth, whose top reached to heaven, up and down which the angels were ever moving. It shall be in no dream of the night, but in the clearest vision of the day,—in the hours when the things of the unseen world shall stand most truly and vividly revealed,—you shall see in me that ladder of all gracious communication between earth and heaven, my humanity fixing firmly the one end of that ladder on earth, in my divinity the other end of that ladder lost amid the splendors of the throne.

At first sight the narrative of these five days after the temptation, which we have thus followed to its close, has but little to attract. It recounts what many might regard as the comparatively insignificant fact of the attachment of five men—all of them Galileans, none of them of any note or rank among the people—to Christ. But of these five men four afterwards became apostles (all of them, indeed, if, as is believed by many of our best critics, Nathanael and Bartholomew were the same person); and two of them, Peter and John, are linked together in the everlasting remembrance

of that Church which they helped to found. Had the Baptist's ministry done nothing more than prepare those five men for the reception of the Messiah, and hand them over so prepared to Jesus, to become the first apostles of the faith, it had not been in vain. These five men were the first disciples of Jesus, and in the narrative of their becoming so we have the history of the infancy of the Church of the living God, that great community of the saints, that growing and goodly company, swelling out to a multitude that no man can number, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. / If there be any interest in tracing the great river that bears at last on its broad bosom the vessels of many lands, to some little bubbling fountain up among the hills ; if there be any interest in tracing the great monarchy whose power overshadowed the earth, to the erection of a little organized community among the Sabine hills ; if the traveller regards with wonder the little gushing stream, or the historian, the first weak beginnings of the Roman commonwealth ; then may the same emotion be permitted to the Christian as he reads the page that tells of the first foundations being laid of a spiritual kingdom, which is to outlive

all the kingdoms of this earth, and abide in its glory for ever.

Still another interest attaches to the narrative now before us. It tells us of the variety of agencies employed in bringing the first of his disciples to Christ. Two of these five men acted on the promptings of the Baptist, one of them on the direct call or summons of our Lord himself; one at the instance of a brother, one on the urgency of a friend. It would be foolish to take these cases of adherence to the Christian cause as typical or representative of the numbers brought respectively to Christ by the voice of the preacher, the word of Christ himself, and the agency of relative or acquaintance; but we cannot go wrong in regarding this variety of agency within so narrow limits, as warranting all means and methods by which any can be won to a true faith in Christ. Whatever these means and methods may be, in order to be effectual they must finally resolve themselves into direct individual address. It was in this way the first five disciples were gathered in. By John speaking to two, Jesus to one, Andrew to one, Philip to one. It is the same species of agency similarly employed which God has always most richly.

blessed ; the direct, earnest, loving appeal of one man to his acquaintance, relative, or friend. How many are there among us who have been engaged for years either in supporting by our liberality, or aiding by our actual service one or other of those societies whose object is to spread Christianity, but who may seldom if ever have endeavored, by direct and personal address, to influence one human soul for its spiritual and eternal good ! Not till more of the spirit of John and Jesus, of Andrew and Philip, as exhibited in this passage, descend upon us, shall we rightly acquit ourselves of our duty as followers of the Lamb.

But in my mind the chief interest of the passage lies in the conduct of our Lord himself. Those five days were not only the birth-time of the Church, they were the beginning of Christ's public ministry, and how does that ministry open ? Silently, gently, unostentatiously ; no public appearances, no great works done, no new instrumentality employed ; by taking two men to live with him for a day, by asking another to follow him, by dealing wisely and tenderly and encouragingly with two others who are brought to him,—so enters the Lord upon the earthly task assigned to

him. Would any one sitting down to devise a career for the Son of God descending upon our earth, to work out the salvation of our race, have assigned such an opening to his ministry, and yet could anything have been more appropriate to him who came not to be ministered unto but to minister, than this turning away from being ministered unto by the angels in the desert, to the rendering of those kindly and all-important services to John and Andrew and Peter, and Philip and Nathanael?

XI.

THE FIRST MIRACLE.*

AND the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee. Looking back to the preceding narrative, you observe that from the time of the arrival at Bethabara of the deputation from Jerusalem sent to inquire into the Baptist's character and claims, an exact note of the time is kept in recording the incidents which followed. "The next day," *i. e.*, the first after that of the appearance of the deputation, John sees Jesus coming unto him, and points him out as the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." "Again, the next day after," standing in company with two of his disciples, John repeats the testimony, and the two disciples followed Jesus; one of them, Andrew, going and bringing his own

* John ii. 1-12.

brother Simon ; the other, John, sitting at his new Master's feet. "The day following," Jesus, setting out on his return to Galilee, findeth Philip. Philip findeth Nathanael, and so, accompanied by these five (Andrew, John, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael), Jesus proceeds upon his way back to his home. Occurring in a narrative like this, where the regular succession of events is so accurately chronicled, we naturally, in coming to the expression, "the third day," interpret it as meaning the third day after the one that had immediately before been spoken of, that is, the one of Christ's departure from the banks of the Jordan. Two days' easy travel carry him and his new attendants to Nazareth, but there is no one there to receive them. The mother of Jesus and his brethren are at Cana, a village lying a few miles farther to the north. Thither they follow them, and find that a marriage is being celebrated there, to the feast connected with which Jesus and his five disciples are invited. One of the five, Nathanael, belonged to Cana, and might have received the invitation on his own account as an acquaintance of the family in whose house the marriage-feast was held. But the others were strangers, only known to

that family as having accompanied Jesus for the last few days,—their tie of discipleship to him quite a recent one, and as yet scarcely recognized by others. That on his account alone, and in consequence of a connexion with him of such a kind, they should have been at once asked to be present at an entertainment to which friends and relatives only were ordinarily invited, would seem to indicate some familiar bond between the family at Nazareth and the one in which this marriage occurs. The idea of some such relationship is supported by the freedom which Mary appears to exercise, speaking to the servants not like a stranger, but as one familiar in the dwelling. Besides, if Simon, called the Canaanite, was called so because of his connexion with the village of Cana, his father Alphæus or Cleophas, who was married to a sister of Christ's mother, may have resided there, and it may have been in his family that this marriage occurred. Could we but be sure of this,—which certainly is probable, and which early tradition affirms,—the circumstance that when Jesus seated himself at this marriage-feast he sat down at a table around which mother, and brothers and sisters, and uncle and aunt, and cousins of his own

now gathered, it would give a peculiarly domestic character to the scene, and throw a new charm and interest around the miracle which was wrought at it. At any rate, we may assume that it was in a family connected by some close ties, whether of acquaintance or relationship with that of Jesus, that the marriage-feast was kept.

“And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith to him, They have no wine.” The wine, provided only for the original number of guests, began to fail. Mary, evidently watching with a kind and womanly interest the progress of the feast, and rightly ascribing the threatened exigency to the unexpected arrival of her son and his companions, becomes doubly anxious to shield a family in which she took such an interest from the painful feeling of having failed in the duties of hospitality. But why did Mary, seeing what she did, and feeling as she did, go to Jesus and say to him, “They have no wine?” That she expected him in some way to interfere is evident; but what ground had she to expect that he would do so in any such manner as he did? She had never seen him work a miracle before. She had no reason, from past experience, to believe that he

would or could make wine at will, or that by his word of power he would supply the deficiency. She had, however, been laying up in her heart, and for thirty years revolving all that had been told her at the beginning about her son. She had none at Nazareth but Joseph to speak to ; none but he who would have believed her had she spoken. Joseph now is dead, and she is left to nurse the swelling hope in her solitary breast. At last the period comes, when rumors of the great preacher of repentance who has appeared in the wilderness of Judea, and to whom the whole country is rushing, spread over Galilee. Her son hears them, and rises from his work, and bids her adieu ; the first time that he has parted from her since she had lost him in Jerusalem, now eighteen years ago. What can be his object in leaving her, his now widowed mother ? She learns—perhaps he himself tells her—that he goes with other Galileans who want to see and hear the new teacher, it may be to enroll themselves by baptism as his disciples. She asks about this new teacher. Can it be that she discovers him to be no other than the son of her relative Elizabeth, whose birth was in so strange a manner linked with that of Jesus ? If so, into what a

tumult of expectation must she have been thrown !

But whether knowing aught of this or not, now at last, after a two months' absence, her son rejoins her, strangely altered in his bearing ; attended, too, by those who, young as he is, hail him as their Master, and pay him all possible respect. She scarcely ventures to ask him what has happened in the interval of his absence ; but them she fully questions ; and as they tell her that John had publicly proclaimed her son to be no other than He whose coming it was his great object to announce ; had pointed to him as the Lamb of God, the Son of God, the Baptizer with the Holy Ghost ; as they tell that they had found in him the Messiah, the Christ, of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, and that it was as such they were now following him,—to what a pitch of joyful expectation must she have been raised ! Now at last the day so long looked for has come. Men have begun to see in him, her son, the Hope of Israel. Soon all Israel shall hail him as their Messiah. Meanwhile he is here among friends and relatives ; has willingly accepted the invitation given to join this marriage-feast ; has lost nothing, as it would seem, of all

his early kindly feelings to those around him. What will he think, what will he do, if he be told that owing to his presence, and that of his disciples, a difficulty has arisen; and discredit is likely to be thrown upon this family, which has shown itself so ready to gratify him, by asking these strangers to share in the festivities of the occasion? She thinks, perhaps, of the cruse of oil, of the barley-loaves of the old prophets. Surely if her son be that great Prophet that is to appear, he might do something to provide for this unforeseen emergency; to meet this want; to keep the heart of this poor, perhaps, but generous household from being wounded. But what shall she ask him to do? what shall she suggest? She will leave that to himself. She knows how kind in heart, how wise in counsel he is, and believes now that his power is equal to his will. She modestly contents herself with simply directing his attention to the fact, and saying to him, "They have no wine."

It is the very delicacy of this approach and address which renders so remarkable our Lord's reply, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?"—exactly the same form of expression which, on more than one occasion, the demons, whom he was about to dispossess,

addressed to Jesus, when they said to him, What have we to do with thee? or, What hast thou to do with us, Jesus, thou Son of God? On their part, such language implied a repudiation of his interference; a denial of and a desire to resist his power and authority. And what can the same form of expression mean as addressed now by Jesus to his mother? Interpret it as we may; soften it to the uttermost so as to remove anything like harshness; still it is the language of resistance and reproof. There may have been some over-haste or impatience on Mary's part; some motherly vanity mingling with her desire to see her son exert his power, and reveal his character before these assembled guests, which required to be gently checked; but our Lord's main object in speaking to her as he did, was to teach Mary that the period of his subjection to her maternal authority had expired; that in the new character he had assumed, in that new sphere of action upon which he had entered, it was not for her, upon the ground simply of her relationship to him, to dictate or suggest what he should do. There was some danger of her forgetting this; of her cherishing and acting on the belief that he was still to be

her son, as he had been throughout those thirty by-past years. It was right, it was even kind, that at very outset she would be guarded against this danger, and saved the disappointment she might have felt had the limits of her influence and authority been left vague and undefined. Jesus would, therefore, have her to know definitely and from the beginning of his ministry, that mother though she was as to his humanity, this gave her no right to interfere with him as the Son of the Highest, the Saviour of mankind. Thus gently but firmly does he repel the bringing of her maternal relationship to bear upon his Messianic work ; thus gently but firmly does he assert and vindicate his perfect independence, disengaging himself from this the closest of earthly ties, that he may stand free in all things to do only the will of his Father in heaven. This manner of his conduct to the mother whom he so tenderly loved, may be regarded as the first of those repeated rebukes which Jesus gave by anticipation to that idolatrous reverence which has carried the human bond into that spiritual kingdom ; carried it even into the heavenly places ; exalting Mary as the Queen of heaven ; seating the crowned mother on a throne sometimes on

a level with, sometimes above that occupied by her Son, teaching us to pray to her as an equal intercessor with Christ.

“Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come.” With him no impatience, no undue haste, no hurrying prematurely into action. He has waited quietly those thirty years, without a single trial of that superhuman strength which lay in him, content to bide till the set time came. And now he waits, even as to the performance of his first miracle, till the right and foreseen hour for its performance has arrived. As to this act of his power, and as to every act of it; as to this incident of his life, and as to every incident of it—he could tell when the hour had not come, and when it had. He who at this marriage-feast could say to Mary, “Mine hour is not yet come,” could say to the Omniscient in the upper chamber at Jerusalem, “Father, the hour is come, glorify thy Son.” Mapped out before his foreseeing eye in all its times, places, events, issues, lay the whole of his earthly life and ministry. The perfect unbroken unity of design and action running throughout the whole, proclaims a previous foresight, a premeditated, well-ordered plan.

It has not been so with any of those men who have played the greatest and most prominent parts on the stage of human history. Their own confessions, the story of their lives, their earlier compared with their later acts, all tell us how little they knew or thought beforehand of what they finally were to be and do. Instead of one fixed, uniform unchanging scheme and purpose running through and regulating the whole life, in all its lesser as well as its greater movements, there have been shiftings and changings of place to suit the shiftings and the changes of circumstance. Surprisals here, disappointments there ; old instruments of action worn out and thrown away, new ones invented and employed ; the life made up of a motley array of many-colored incidents, out of which have come issues never dreamt of at the beginning. Was it so with the life that Jesus lived on earth ? Had he been a mere man, committing himself to a great work under the guidance of a sublime, yet purely human, and therefore weak and blind impulse—had he seen only so far into the future as the unaided human eye could carry, how much was there in the earlier period of his ministry to have excited false hopes, how much in the latter to

have produced despondency! But the people come in multitudes around him, and you can trace no sign of extravagant expectation. The tide of popular favor ebbs away from him, and you see no token of his giving up his enterprise in despair. No wavering of purpose, no change of plan, no altering of his course to suit new and obviously unforeseen emergencies. There is progress: a steady advance onward to the final consummation of the cross and the burial, the resurrection and ascension: but all is consistent, all is harmonious. The attempt has been lately made, with all the resources of scholarship and all the skill of genius, to detect a discrepancy of design and expectation between the opening and closing stages of our Saviour's earthly course. It has failed. I cannot help thinking that all candid and intelligent readers of that life as we have it in the Gospels, whatever be their religious opinions or prepossessions, will acknowledge that Mr. Rees's picture is patent and complete. If so, I know that life of Jesus Christ distinguished from all others by a fixed, pre-established, unvarying design.*

* This feature in our Lord's character appears to have strongly impressed the mind of Napoleon I., as appears from the following remarks.

Our Lord's answer to Mary was ill fitted, we might imagine, to foster hope, postponing

"In every other life than that of Christ, what imperfections, what inconsistencies! Where is the character that no opposition is sufficient to overwhelm? Where is the individual whose conduct is never modified by event or circumstance, who never yields to the influences of the time, never accommodates himself to manners or passions that he cannot prevail to alter?

"I defy you to cite another life like that of Christ, exempt from the least vacillation of this kind, untainted by any such blots or wavering purpose. From first to last he is the same; always the same, majestic and simple, infinitely severe and infinitely gentle; throughout a life that may be said to have been lived under the public eye, Jesus never gives occasion to find fault; the prudence of his conduct compels our admiration by its union of force and gentleness. Alike in speech and action, Jesus is enlightened, consistent, and calm. Sublimity is said to be an attribute of Divinity; what name then shall we give to him in whose character were united every attribute of the sublime?

"I know men; and I tell you that Jesus is not a man.

"In Lycurgus, Numa, Confucius, and Mahomet, I only see legislators who, having attained to the first place in the State, have sought the best solution of the social problem; I see nothing in them that reveals Divinity; they themselves have not pitched their claims so high.

"It is evident that it is only posterity that has deified the world's first despots,—heroes, the princes of the nations, and the founders of the earliest republics. For my part, I see in the heathen gods and those great men, beings of the same nature with myself. Their intelligence, after all, differs from mine only in form. They burst upon the world, played a great part in their day, as I have done in mine. Nothing in them proclaims divinity: on the contrary, I see numerous resemblances between them and me,—common weaknesses and errors. Their faculties are such as I myself possess; there is no difference save in the use that we have made of them, in accordance with the different ends we had in view, our different countries and the circumstances of our times.

apparently to an indefinite period any interposition on his part. And yet she turns instantly to the servants, and says to them : " Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." However surprised or perplexed she may have been, she appears as confident as ever that he would interpose. It may have been her strong and hopeful faith which, notwithstanding the discouraging reply, sustained her expectation ; or there may have been something in the tone and manner of her son, something in the way he laid the emphasis as he pronounced the words, *Mine hour is not yet come*, which con-

"It is not so with Christ. Everything in him amazes me ; his spirit outreaches mine, and his will confounds me. Comparison is impossible between him and any other being in the world. He is truly a being by himself : his ideas and his sentiments, the truth that he announces, his manner of convincing, are all beyond humanity and the natural order of things.

"His birth, and the story of his life, the profoundness of his doctrine which overturns all difficulties, and is their most complete solution, his Gospel, the singularity of this mysterious being, his appearance, his empire, his progress through all centuries and kingdoms,—all this is to me a prodigy, an unfathomable mystery, which plunges me into a reverie from which there is no escape, a mystery which is ever within my view, a permanent mystery which I can neither deny nor explain.

"I see nothing here of man. Near as I may approach, closely as I may examine, all remains above my comprehension, great with a greatness that crushes me ; it is in vain that I reflect—all remains unaccountable."—*Sentiments de Napoléon sur le Christianisme, par le CHEVALIER DE BEAUTERNE.*

veyed to her the impression that the hour was approaching, was near,—a speedy compliance shining through the apparent refusal. But why did she give that order to the servants, or how could she anticipate that it was through their instrumentality that the approaching supply was to be conveyed? Without some hint being given, some word or look of Jesus pointing in that direction, she could scarcely have conjectured beforehand what the mode of his action was to be.

Leaving the mystery which arises here unresolved, as being left without the key to open it, let us look at the simple, easy, unostentatious way in which the succeeding miracle was wrought. There stand—at the entrance, perhaps, of the dwelling—six water-pots of stone ; Jesus saith to the servants, Fill the water-pots with water. They do so, filling them to the brim. Jesus saith, Draw out now, and bear to the governor of the feast. They do so ; it is not water, but choicest wine they bear. The ruler of the feast at once detects it as better wine than they had previously been drinking, and addresses the bridegroom. The latter gives no reply, for he does not know whence or how this new supply of better wine has come.

As little know the guests who partake of it ; nor, perhaps, till the feast is over, and the servants tell what had been done, is it known by what a miracle of power the festivities of that social board had been sustained. What a veiling this of the hand and power of the operator ! Imagine only that Jesus had asked the servants, while the water was water still, to draw it out and fill each goblet,—had asked each guest to lift up his cup and taste, and see what kind of liquid it contained,—and then, by a word of his power, had turned the crystal water into the ruddy wine. With what gaping wonder would every one have then been filled ! Instead of this, ordering it so that what came to the guests appeared to come through the ordinary channel, without word or touch, aught said or done, in obedience to an inward volition of the Lord, the water hidden in the vessels is changed instantaneously into wine. There was the same dignified ease and simplicity, the same absence of ostentation, about all Christ's miracles proper to him who used not a delegated but an intrinsic power.

Struck with the manner in which Christ met the domestic need and protected the family character, we must not overlook the largeness

of the provision that he made. At the most moderate computation, the six water-pots must have held far more than enough to meet the requirements of the marriage-feast ; enough of wine for that household for many months to come. In the overflowing generosity of his kindness, he does so much more than Mary would have asked or could have conceived. And still, to all who feel their need and come to him to have their spiritual wants supplied, he does exceedingly abundantly above all that they ask, and all that they can think.

When the governor of the feast had tasted the new-made wine, he called the bridegroom, and said to him, “ Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine ; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse ; but thou hast kept the good wine until now.” He knew not whence that better wine had come ; he knew not to whom it was they owed it ; he knew not that, in contrasting as he did the custom of keeping the best wine to the last, with that commonly followed at marriage-feasts, he was but showing forth, as in a figure, the way in which the Spiritual Bridegroom acts to all those who are called to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Not as the world giveth, gives Jesus to

his own. The world gives its best and richest first. At the board which it spreads the viands may not fail ; nay, may even grow in number and improve in quality, but soon they pall on the sated appetite, and the end of the world's feast is always worse and less enjoyable than the beginning. Who has found it so of the provisions of a Saviour's grace ; of those quiet, soothing, satisfying pleasures, that true faith in him imparts ? The more of these that any one receives, the more he enjoys them. The appetite grows with the food it feeds upon ; the relish increases with the appetite ; better and better things are still provided, and of each new cup of pleasure put into our hands, turning to the heavenly Provider, we may say, Thou hast kept the good wine even until now.

This the beginning of his miracles, did Jesus in Cana of Galilee. The miracle lay in the instantaneous transmutation of water into wine. And yet the water with which those water-pots were filled, and in which this change was wrought, might have been drawn from the well of a vineyard, and instead of being poured into these stone vessels, might have been poured out over the soil into which the vine-plants struck their roots, and by these roots might have been

drawn up into the stem, and through the branches been distilled into the grapes, and out of the grapes been pressed into the vat, and in that vat, have fermented into wine. And thus, by the many steps and secret processes of nature might that water without a miracle, as we say, have been converted into wine. But is each step or stage of that natural transmutation less wonderful? does it show inferior wisdom? is it done by a feebler power? Just as little can we explain the process as spread out into multiplied details in the great laboratory of nature, as when condensed into one single act. And just as much should we see the divine hand and power in the one as in the other. He who sees God in the one—the miracle, and not in the other, the processes of nature—has not the right faith in God. If we did not believe that God was operating throughout, working everywhere; his will and power the spring and support of every movement in the material creation, we should not believe that he is operating here or there, in this miracle or in that. It is because we believe in the universal agency of the living God, that we are prepared to believe in that agency in any singular form that it occasionally may take. There is, indeed, a

difference between a miracle and any of the ordinary operations of nature ; a difference not in the agent, not in the power, but simply in the manner in which the power and agency are employed. In the one, the hand of the Great Operator works slowly, uniformly, doing the same things always in the same way ; his footsteps follow each other so surely and so regularly, that by a delusion of the understanding, we come to think that the things that follow each other so uniformly are not only naturally but necessarily linked to one another,—the one by some imagined inherent power drawing the other after it ; needing no power but their own to bind them together at the first, or keep them bound together afterwards. Wherever there is orderly succession—and it pervades the whole universe of material things—we can classify the different processes that go on, and so reach what we call the laws of nature, which, after all, are but expressions of the orderly manner in which certain results are brought about ; but to these laws, as if they were living things, and had a vital power and energy belonging to them, we come to attribute the actual accomplishment of the results. It happens thus that the works of his hands in the midst

of which we live, and which for his glory and our good, the Great Creator and Sustainer makes to move on with such fixed and orderly, stately and beautiful array, instead of being a clear translucent medium through which we see him, become often as a thick obscuring veil, hiding him from our sight. Hence the use of miracles, that He who worketh all in all, and worketh thus, should sometimes break as it were this order, that through the rent we might see the hand which had been hidden behind that self-constructed veil.

And yet when we speak thus of a miracle as a breaking-in upon the ordinary and established course of nature, let us not think of it as if it were discord thrust into a harmony ; something loose, irregular, disjointed, coming in to mar the beautiful and orderly progression. In that harmonious progression, the lower ever yields to the higher. The vital powers, for instance, in plants and animals, are ever modifying the mechanical powers, the laws of motion ; the will of man comes in, in still more striking manner, to do the same thing with all the powers and processes of nature. You do not say that such crossings and counteractions of lower by higher laws disturb the harmony of nature ;

they go to constitute it. And we believe that just as falsely as you would say that the order of nature was broken, the law of gravitation was violated, when the sap ascends in the stem of the tree, and is distributed upwards through its branches ; just as falsely is it said of the miracles of Christianity, that they break that order, or violate any of nature's laws ; for did we but know enough of that spiritual kingdom for whose establishment and advancement they were wrought, we should perceive that here too there was law and order, and that what we now call miracles were but instances of the lower yielding to the higher ; that the grand, unbroken harmony of the vast universe, material, mental, moral, spiritual, may be sustained and promoted.

This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory. The glory that was thus revealed lay not so much in the forthputting of almighty power (for it is an inferior glory that the bare exercise of any power, though it be divine, displays), as in the manner in which the power is exercised, the ends it is put forth to accomplish. Power appears here as the handmaid and minister of Loving Kindness, and gathers thus a richer

glory than its own around it. Never let us forget that the first act of our Lord's public life was to grace a marriage by his presence. By doing so, he has for ever consecrated that and every other human bond and relationship. And the first exercise of his almighty power was to minister to the enjoyment of a marriage-feast. He who would not in the extremity of hunger employ his power to procure food for himself, put it forth to increase the comforts of others. By doing so, he has for ever consecrated all the innocent enjoyments of life. It will not do to say, that his example here is no pattern to us ; that what was safe for him might be injurious to us ; for he not only accepted the invitation for himself, but took his disciples along with him to the marriage-feast. There is something peculiarly striking and instructive in our Lord coming so directly from consort with the austere ascetic preacher of the wilderness, and carrying along with him these first disciples, the majority of whom had been John's disciples before they were his, and seating them by his side at this festive board. Does it not teach what the genius and spirit of his religion is ? That it affects not the desert ; that it shuns not the fellowship of man ;

that it frowns not on social joys and pleasures ; that it rejoices as readily with those who rejoice as it weeps with those who weep ; ready to be with us in our hours of gladness, as well as in our hours of grief. Let no table be spread to which He who graced the marriage-feast at Cana could not be invited ; let no pleasure be indulged in which could not live in the light of his countenance. Let his presence and blessing be with us and upon us wherever we go and however we are engaged ; and is the way not open by which the miracle of Cana may, in spirit, be repeated daily still, and the water of every earthly enjoyment turned into the very wine of heaven ?

XII.

THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE.*

THE miracle at the marriage-feast drew a marked line of distinction between Jesus, the Baptist, and the austere Essenes, those eremites who dwelt apart, shut up in a kind of monastic seclusion, and who renounced the use of wine, condemned marriage, and denounced all bodily indulgence as injurious to the purity of the spirit. By acting as he did at Cana, Jesus at the very outset of his career placed himself in direct opposition to the strictest class of pietists then existing,—in direct opposition to the spirit and practice of those in all ages who have sought, by withdrawal from the world and estrangement from all objects of sense, to cultivate communion with the unseen, to rise to a closer intercourse with and nearer resemblance to the Deity.

* John ii. 12-21 ; Matt. xxi. 10-17.

One effect of this first display by Jesus of his supernatural power was a strengthening of the faith of the men who had recently attached themselves to him. "His disciples," it is said, "believed in him." They had believed before, but they believed more firmly now. The ground of their first faith had been the testimony of the Baptist. Their faith had grown during the few days of private intercourse with Jesus which succeeded, and now, by the manifestation of his power and glory, it was still more strengthened. It was still, as later trial too clearly proved, weak and imperfect. But their minds and hearts were in such a condition that they lay open to the influence of additional light as to their Master's character, additional evidence of his authority and power. But there were other spectators of the miracle upon whom it exerted no such happy influence. After the Marriage-feast at Cana broke up, "Jesus and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples went down to Capernaum." This is the first mention of those brethren of Christ who appear more than once in the subsequent history, always associated with Mary, as forming part of her family, carefully distinguished from the apostles and disciples of the Lord.

They are represented on one occasion as going out after him, thinking he was beside himself; and when he was told that Mary and they stood at the outskirts of the crowd desiring to see him, he exclaimed, "Who is my mother, and who are my brethren? Whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." On another occasion, the Nazarines referred to them when, astonished and offended, they said to one another, "Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary, and his brethren James, and Joses, and Simon and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us?" John tells that at a still later period, in the beginning of the last year of our Lord's ministry, these relatives taunted him, saying, "If thou do these things, show thyself to the world; for neither did his brethren believe in him." Had we been reading these passages for the first time, we should scarcely have understood them otherwise than as referring to those who were related to Jesus as children of the same mother. This would of course imply that Mary had other children than Jesus, an idea to which from the earliest period there seems to have been the strongest

repugnance. Resting upon the well-known usage which allowed the term brother and sister to be extended to more distant relationships, and upon the acknowledged difficulty which arises in connexion with the names of our Lord's brothers as given by the Evangelists, both the Greek and the Latin Churches, though adopting different theories as to the exact nature of the relationship, have indignantly repudiated the idea of Mary's having any but one child, and have regarded those spoken of as his brothers as being either his half-brothers, sons of Joseph by another marriage, or his cousins, the children of Mary's sister, the wife of Alphæus or Cleophas. It would be out of place here to enter upon the discussion of this difficult question. I can only say that, after weighing all the objections which have been adduced, I can see no sufficient reason for rejecting the first and most natural reading of the passages I have referred to, for not believing that they were brothers and sisters of Jesus, who grew up along with him in the household at Nazareth. Perhaps our readiness to admit this may partly spring from our not sharing the impression that there is anything in such a belief either derogatory

to the character of Mary, or to the true dignity of her first-born Son.

Whoever they were, and however related to him, these brethren of the Lord, his nearest relatives, who had all along been living, if not under the same roof, yet in close and intimate acquaintance with him, sat beside his disciples at that marriage-feast, and saw the wonder that was done, and they did not believe. As months rolled on, they saw and heard of still greater wonders wrought in the presence of multitudes. Residing with Mary at Capernaum, they lived in the very heart of that commotion which the teaching and acts of Jesus excited. Neither did they then believe. Their unbelief may have been in part sustained by Christ's having ceased to make their home his home, and chosen twelve strangers as his close and constant companions and friends. Nor did any of them believe in Jesus all through the three years of his ministry. But it is pleasing to note that, though so long and so stubbornly maintained, their unbelief did at last give way; you see them in that upper room to which the apostles retired after witnessing the ascension: "And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room,

where abode both Peter and James, and John and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son Alphæus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren." How many an apt remark on the peculiar barriers which the closer ties of domestic life often oppose to the influence of the one Christian member of a household, and on the peculiar encouragement which such a one has to persevere, might be grounded upon the fact that it was not till after his death that our Lord's own immediate relatives believed in him.

When the marriage-feast at Cana was over, Jesus and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples went down to Capernaum. Of this town we shall have more to say hereafter, when it became the chosen centre of our Lord's Galilean ministry. One advantage of the short visit that Jesus now paid to it was, that it put him on the route along which the already gathering bands of visitors from Northern Galilee passed southwards to the capital. The Pass-over was at hand, and Jesus went up to

Jerusalem. Hitherto, though some time had passed (two or three months perhaps, but there are no materials for exactly determining) since his baptism, and the public proclamation of his Messiahship, Jesus had taken no public step, none implying any assumption on his part of the office to which he had been designated. Of the few men who attended him, there was but one whom he had asked to follow him ; nor was it yet understood whether he and the rest were to accompany him for more than a few days. The miracle at Cana was rather of a private and domestic than of a public character. Nothing that we know of was said or done by Jesus at Capernaum, or throughout the short visit to Galilee, to indicate his entrance on a public career.

But now he is in Jerusalem, in the place where most appropriately the first revelation of himself in his new character is made. Let us acknowledge that it is not in the form in which we should have expected it ; nor in that form in which any Jew of that age would ever have imagined that the Messiah should first show himself. We may be able, by meditating a little upon it, to see more of its suitableness than at first sight appears. But even a first

glance reveals how utterly unlike it was to the popular Jewish conception of the advent of the Messiah. One of the first things our Lord does at Jerusalem is to go up into the Temple. He passes through one of the gates of its surrounding walls. He enters into the large open area which on all sides encompasses the sacred edifice. What a spectacle meets his eye ! There, all round, attached to the walls, are lines of booths or shops in which money-changers are plying their usurious trade. The centre space is crowded with oxen and with sheep exposed for sale, and between the buyers and the sellers all the turbulent traffic of a cattle-market is going on. It goes on within the outer enclosure, but close upon the inner buildings of the Holy Place ; so close that the loud hum from the crowded court of the Gentiles must have been heard to their no small disturbance by the priests and worshippers within. How comes all this ? and who is responsible for this desecration of the Temple ? The origin of it in one sense was natural enough. At all the great festivals, but especially at the Passover, an almost inconceivable number of animals were offered up in sacrifice. Josephus tells us of more than two hundred thousand victims sacri-

ficed in the course of a single Passover celebration. The greatest proportion of these were not brought up from the country by the offerers, but were purchased on their arrival at Jerusalem. An extensive traffic, yielding no inconsiderable gain to those engaged in it, was thus created. Some open area for conducting it was needed. The heads of the priesthood, to whom the custody of the Temple was committed, saw that good rents were got for any suitable market-ground which the city could supply. They were tempted to fill their own coffers from this source. Jerusalem could furnish no place so suitable for the exposure of the animals as the Court of the Gentiles. What more convenient than that the victims should be purchased in the very neighborhood of the place where they were to be offered up? The greed of gain prevailed over all care for the sanctity of the Temple. The Court of the Gentiles was let out to the cattle-dealers, and a large amount was thus added to the yearly revenue of the Temple. Still another source of gain lay open, and was taken advantage of. Every one who came up to the Passover, and desired to take part in the festival, had to present a half-shekel of Jewish money to the priests. This kind of money was

not now in general use ; it was scarce even in Judea, unknown beyond that land. Nothing, however, but the half-shekel of the sanctuary would be taken at the Temple. To supply themselves with the needed coin, visitors had to go to the money-changer. And where can he find a fitter place to erect his booth and set out his table than within the very area in which the larger traffic was going on ? He offers so much to the priesthood to be permitted to do so ; the bribe is taken, and the booth and the tables are erected. And so, amid a perfect Babel of tongues, and thronging, jostling crowds of men and beasts, the buying and the selling and the money-changing are all going on.

Into the heart of this tumultuous throng Jesus enters. Of the many hundreds there, few have ever seen him before ; few know anything about him, either about his baptism in the Jordan, or his late miracle at Cana. He appears as a stranger, a young man clad in the simple garb of a Galilean peasant, without any badge of authority in his hand. He looks around with an eye of indignant sorrow, pours out the changers' money, overthrows their tables, forming a scourge of small cords drives

the herds of cattle before him, and mingling consideration with his zeal, says to them who sold the doves, "Take these things hence ; make not my Father's house a house of merchandise." Why is it that at the touch of his slender scourge, and the bidding of this youthful stranger, buyers and sellers stop their traffic, the money-changers suffer their money to be rudely handled, and their tables to be overturned ? The slightest resistance of so many against one would have been sufficient to have arrested the movement. But no such resistance is attempted, no opposition is made, by men not likely from their occupation to be remarkable for mildness of disposition or pliability of character. How are we to explain this ? We can understand how, at the last Passover, at the close of his ministry, when Jesus, then so well known, so generally recognized by the people as a prophet, repeated this cleansing of the Temple, there should have been a yielding to his authoritative command. But what are we to say of such an occurrence taking place at the very commencement of his ministry, his first public act in Jerusalem ? It is a mysterious power which some men, in time of excitement, by look and word and tone of command,

can exercise over their fellow-men. But grant that rare power in its highest degree to Jesus, it will scarce account for this scene in the Court of the Gentiles at Jerusalem. It would seem as if, in eye and voice and action, the divine power and authority that lay in Jesus broke forth into visible manifestation, and laid such a spell upon those rough cattle-drivers and those cold calculators of the money-tables, that all power of resistance was for the time subdued. It would seem as if it pleased him to exert here within the Temple the same influence that he did afterwards in the Garden, when he stepped forth from the darkness into the full moonlight, and said to the rough band that advanced with their lanterns and swords and staves to take him, "I that speak unto you am he;" and when at the sight and word they reeled backward and fell to the ground, the effect in both cases was but temporary. High priests and officers were soon upon their feet again; and, wondering at their own weakness in yielding to a power which at the moment they were impotent to resist, proceeded to lay hold upon Jesus, and lead him away unto Caiaphas. So was it also, we believe, in the Temple court. A sudden, mysterious, irresistible power is upon

that crowd. They yield, they know not why. But by and by the spell would seem to be withdrawn. They soon recover from its effect. Nor is it long till, wondering at their having allowed a single man, and one who had no right whatever, to interfere with arrangements made by the chief authorities, and to lord it over them, they return, resume their occupations, and all goes on as before.

It was with no intention or expectation of putting an end in this way to the desecration of the Holy Place that Jesus acted. What, then, was the purpose of his act? It was meant to be a public proclamation of his Sonship to God ; an open assertion and exercise of his authority as sustaining this relation ; a protest in his Father's name against the conduct of the priesthood in permitting this desecration of the Holy Place. It was far more for the priesthood than for the crowd in the market-place that it was meant. They were not ignorant that the chief object of the ministry of the Baptist, with which the whole country was ringing, was to announce the immediate coming of the Messiah. They had not long before sent a deputation to the banks of the Jordan to ask John whether he himself

were not the Messiah whose near advent he was foretelling. The members of that deputation heard of the baptism of Jesus ; in all likelihood they had not left the place when Jesus came back from the temptation in the Wilderness, and was publicly pointed to by John as the greater than himself who was to come after him, the Lamb of God, the Son of God. From the lips of the men whom they had sent, or from the lips of others, they must have known all about what had happened. And now here among them is this Jesus of Nazareth ; here he is come up to the Temple, speaking and acting as if it were his part and office authoritatively to interpose and cleanse the building of all its defilements. What else could the priesthood who had charge of the Temple understand than that here was claimed a jurisdiction in regard to it superior to their own ? What else could they understand when the words were heard, or were repeated to them, “ Make not my Father’s house a house of merchandise,” than that here was one who claimed a relationship to God as his Father, and a right over the Temple as his Father’s house, which none but *One* could claim ? They go to him, therefore, or they call him before

them, and entering, you will remark, into no justification of their own deed in hiring out the Temple court as they had done,—entering into no argument with him as to the rightness or wrongness of what he had done, rather admitting that if he were indeed a prophet, as his acts showed that he at least pretended to be, his act was justifiable ; they proceed upon the assumption that he was bound to give to them some proof of his carrying a Divine commission, and they say to him, “What sign showest thou unto us, seeing thou doest those things?”

He had shown a good enough sign already, had they read it aright. He was about to show signs numerous and significant enough in the days that immediately succeeded ; but to such a haughty challenge as this, coming, as he knew, from men whom no sign would convince of his Messiahship, he had but this reply : “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” A truly dark saying ; one that, not only they did not and could not at the time understand, but that they were almost certain to misunderstand, and, misunderstanding, to turn against the speaker, as if he meant to claim the possession of a power which he never

could be called upon to exercise. Then said the Jews, interpreting, as they could scarce fail to do, his words as applicable to the material Temple: "Forty-and-six years has this Temple been in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?"*

Jesus made no attempt to rectify the error into which his questioners had fallen. He could not well have done so without a premature disclosure of his death and resurrection, a thing that he carefully avoided till the time of their accomplishment drew near. He left this mysterious saying to be interpreted against himself. It seems to have taken a deep hold, to have been widely circulated, and to have

* It is curious that, in saying so, they have left to us one of the few fixed and certain data upon which we can determine the year when the public ministry of our Lord began. We know that the building, or rather rebuilding of the Temple, was commenced by Herod in the eighteenth year of his reign; that is, speaking according to the Roman method of counting their years from the foundation of Rome, during the year that began in the spring of 734, and ended in that of 735. Forty-six years from this would bring us to the year 780-781. Historical statements and astronomical calculations conspire to prove that it must have been between the 13th March and the 4th April, in the year 750, that Herod died. If Christ were born a few months before that death, thirty years forward from that time brings us to the year 780, as that in which our Lord's ministry commenced;—the two independent computations thus singularly confirming one another.

fixed itself very deeply in the memory of the people. Three years afterwards, when they were trying to convict him of some crime in reference to religion, this first saying of his was brought up against him, as one uttered blasphemously against the Temple, but the two witnesses could not agree about the words. And when the cross was raised, those who passed by railed on him, saying, "Ah, thou that destroyest the Temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself." Whatever differences there were in the remembrances and reports of the people, in one thing they agreed, in the attributing the destruction of the Temple that Jesus had spoken of here, to himself. But he had not spoken of the destruction as effected by his own hands, but by those of the Jews themselves. And he had not had in his eye the material Temple on Mount Moriah, but the temple of his body, which they were to destroy, and which he, three days afterwards, was to raise from the dead. All this became plain afterwards, and went, when his real meaning stood revealed in the event, mightily to confirm the faith of his followers. And in one respect it may still go to confirm ours, for does not that saying of Jesus, uttered so early,

—his first word, we may say, to the leaders of the people at Jerusalem,—does it not, along with so many other like evidences, go to prove how clearly the Lord saw the end from the beginning?

The Temple at Jerusalem has long been in ruins. In its stead there stands now before us the Church of the body of Christ, the society of the faithful. In her corporate capacity, in her corporate actings, has the Church not acted over again what the Jews did with their Temple, when she has made merchandise of her offices and her revenues, and sold them to the highest bidder, as you would sell oxen in the market or meat in the shambles? The spirit which prompts such open sacrilegious acts, such gross making gain of godliness, is the self-same spirit which our Lord rebuked; and how often does it creep into and take hold and spread like a defiling leprosy over the house of God? It does so in the pulpit, whenever self, in one or other of its insidious forms, frames the speech and animates the utterance; it does so in the pew, when in the hour hallowed to prayer and praise, the chambers of thought, and imagery within are crowded with worldly guests. Know ye not, brethren, that ye are

the temple of God ; and that the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are ? Would that half the zeal the Saviour showed in cleansing the earthly building were but shown by each of us in the purifying and cleansing of our hearts ! Truly it is no easy task to drive out thence everything that defileth in his sight, to keep out as well as to put out ; for, quick as were those buyers and sellers of old in coming back to their places in the Temple, and resuming their occupations there, quicker still are those vain and sinful desires, dispositions, imaginations, which in our moments of excited zeal we have expelled from our hearts, in returning to their old and well-loved haunts. The Lord of the temple must come himself to cleanse it ; come, not once or twice, as in the case of the Temple at Jerusalem ; come, not as a transient visitor, but as an abiding guest ; not otherwise than by his own indwelling shall these unhallowed inmates be ejected and kept without, and the house made worthy of Him who deigns to occupy it.

XIII.

THE CONVERSATION WITH NICODEMUS.*

CHRIST'S first visit to Jerusalem, after his baptism, appears to have been a brief one ; not longer, perhaps, than that usually paid by those who went up to the Passover. Besides the cleansing of the Temple he wrought some miracles which are left unrecorded, but which we may believe were of the same kind as his subsequent ones, and these were generally miracles of healing. Many believed on him when they saw those miracles performed ; believed on him as a wonder-worker, as a man who had the great power of God at his command ; but their faith scarcely went further, involved in it little or no recognition of his true character and office. Although they believed in him, Jesus did not believe in them (for it is the same word which is used in the two cases).

* John iii. 1-21.

Knowing what was in them, as he knew what was in all men, undeceived by appearance or profession, he entered into no close or friendly relations with them ; made no hasty or premature discovery of himself.

But there was one man to whom he did commit himself on the occasion of this first and short residence in Jerusalem, to whom he did make such a discovery of himself, as we shall presently see he never made to any other single person in the whole course of his ministry. This was a man of the Pharisees, one of the sect that became the most bitter persecutors of Christ ; a ruler too of the Jews, a man well educated, of good position, and in high office ; a member of the Sanhedrim. He was one of the body that not long ago had sent the deputation down to the Jordan to inquire about the Baptist. He knew all about John's ministry, about his announcing that the kingdom of God was at hand, that there was One coming after him who was to baptize not with water but with the Holy Ghost. He had been wondering what this ministry of John could mean, when Jesus appeared in the city, cleansed the Temple, wrought those miracles. He saw that among the class to which he be-

longed, the appearance and acts of the young Nazarene, who had assumed and exercised such an authority within the courts of the Temple, and when challenged had given such an unsatisfactory reply, had excited nothing but distrust and antipathy; a distrust and antipathy, however, in which he did not, could not share. He could not concur with those who spake of him as an ignorant rustic, a mere blind zealot, whom a fit of fanaticism had driven to do what he did in the Temple; still less could he agree with those who spake of him as an impostor, a deceiver of the people. We do not know what words of Christ's he heard, what acts of his he witnessed; but the impression had come upon him, whencesoever it came, that he was altogether different from what his fellow-rulers were disposed to believe. Could this indeed be the man of whom John spake so much; could this be indeed the Christ, the Messiah for whom so many were longing? If he was, what new and higher truths would he unfold, what a glorious kingdom would he usher in! Restless and unsatisfied with things as they were, all his Pharisaic strictness in the keeping of the law having failed to quiet his conscience, and give comfort to his heart, Nico-

demus was looking about and longing for further light. Perhaps this stranger, who has come to Jerusalem, may be able to help him. He may be poor and mean, a Galilean by birth, without official rank or authority ; but what of that, if he be really what he seems, one clothed with a Divine commission ; what of that, if he can quench in any way this thirst of heart and soul which burns within ? If he could be seen by him alone, Jesus would surely lay aside that reserve which he appeared to maintain, and instruct him fully as to the mysteries of the coming kingdom. But how could such a private interview be brought about ? He might send for him ; and sent for by one in his position, Jesus might not refuse to come. But then it would be noised abroad that he had been entertaining the Nazarene in his dwelling. Or he might go to him when he was teaching in public, but then it would be seen and known of all men that he had paid him an open mark of respect. He was not prepared to face either of these alternatives ; he was too timid, thought too much of what his companions and friends and the general public of the city might think or say. Yet he is too eager to throw the chance away. He must see Jesus, and as his

fears keep him from going to or sending for him by day, he goes by night, breaks in upon his retirement, asks and obtains the audience.

There was something wrong, no doubt, in his choosing such a time and way for the interview. It would have been a manlier, more heroic thing for him to have braved all danger, and risen above all fear of man. But whatever blame we may choose on this ground to attach to Nicodemus, let it not obscure our perception of his obvious honesty and earnestness, his intense desire for further enlightenment, his willingness to receive instruction. He came by night, but he was the only one of his order who came at all. He came by night, but it was not to gratify an idle curiosity, but in the disquiet of a half-awakened conscience to seek for peace. Rabbi, he says, as soon as he finds himself in Christ's presence. He salutes him with all respect. The Rabbis of the Temple would have scorned the claim of one so young in years, unknown in any of their schools, who had given no proof of his acquaintance with their laws and their traditions,—to be regarded as one of them. But the Ruler, in all likelihood by many years Christ's senior, and one who on other grounds might have counted on

being the saluted rather than the saluter, does not hesitate to address him thus : " Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God : for no man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him." He shows at once his respect, his candor, his intelligence, and his faith. He does not doubt that those are real miracles which Jesus has been working ; he is ready to trace to its true source the power employed in their accomplishment ; he is prepared at once to acknowledge that the worker of such miracles must be one sent and sanctioned by God. In saying so, he knows that he is saying more than perhaps any other man of his station in Jerusalem would be ready to say. He thinks that he says enough to win for himself a favorable reception. Yet, he is speaking far below the truth, much under his own half-formed conceptions and beliefs. It is but as a teacher, not as a prophet, much less the great Prophet, that he addresses Jesus.

One might have expected that, having addressed him as such, he would go on to put the questions to which he presumed that such a teacher could give replies. But he pauses, perhaps imagining that, gratified by such a visit, pleased at being saluted thus by one of

the rulers, Jesus will salute him in return, and save him the trouble of inquiry by making some disclosures of the new doctrine which, as a teacher sent from God, he had come to teach ; or by telling him something more about that new kingdom which so many were expecting to see set up. How surprised he must have been when so abruptly, yet so solemnly, without exchange of salutation or word of preface, Jesus says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Such a man as Nicodemus could scarcely have been so stupid as to believe that, in speaking of being born again, Jesus meant a second birth of the body. He is so disconcerted, however, disappointed, perplexed, besides being perhaps a little irritated, by both the manner and the substance of the grave, emphatic utterance—one which, however general in its terms, was obviously spoken with a direct and personal reference—that, in his confusion, he seizes upon the expression as the only one that had as yet conveyed any definite idea to his mind. As affording him some ground of exception, some material for reply, and taking it in its literal sense, he says : How can a man be born again

when he is old, old as I am? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? The wise and gentle teacher in whose hands he now is, takes no notice of the folly or petulance of the remark. He reiterates what he had said, modifying, however, his expressions, so that Nicodemus could not fail to see of what kind of second birth it was that he was speaking: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

Had Nicodemus only had time at first to collect his thoughts, he would have remembered that it was no new term, framed now for the first time, that Jesus had been employing in speaking of a second birth; it being a proverbial expression with his countrymen with reference to those who became proselytes to the Jewish faith, and were admitted as such into the Jewish community, that they were as men new-born. The outward mode of admitting such proselytes to the enjoyment of Jewish privileges was by baptism, by washing with water. John, had adopted this rite, and by demanding that all Jews should be baptized with the baptism of repentance, as a prepara-

tion on their part for the coming of the kingdom, he had in fact already proclaimed, that, as every heathen man became as a new man on entering into the commonwealth of Israel, so every Jewish man must become a new man before entering into that new kingdom which the Messiah was to introduce and establish. It was virtually to symbolize the importance and necessity of repentance—that change of mind and heart which formed the burden of his preaching, as a qualification in all candidates for admission into the kingdom—that John came baptizing with water. But he took great pains to inform his hearers that, while he baptized with water, there was one coming immediately, who was to baptize with the Holy Ghost. Was it likely then, or we may even say, was it possible that, when Nicodemus now heard Jesus say, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,” he could fail to perceive the allusion to the water baptism of John and the Spirit baptism of the Messiah?

In common with all his countrymen, Nicodemus had assumed that, be it what it might, come how or when it might, the Messianic Kingdom would be one within which their very

birth as Jews would entitle them to be ranked. The popular delusion John had already, by his baptism and his teaching, done something to rectify. The full truth it was reserved for Jesus to proclaim, and he does it now to Nicodemus. This master in Israel has come to Jesus to be taught ; let him know then that it is not a new doctrine, but a new life which Jesus has come to proclaim and to impart. It is not by knowing so much, or believing in such truths, or practising such duties that a man is to qualify himself for becoming a subject of the spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ. First of all, as a necessary preliminary, he must be born again ; born of the Spirit, have spiritual life imparted, before he can see so as to apprehend its real nature, before he can enter so as to partake of its true privileges, the kingdom of God. This kingdom is not an outward or a national one, not the kingdom of a creed, or of an external organized community. It is a kingdom exclusively of the new-born—of those who have been begotten of the Spirit—of those who have been born again, not of blood, nor of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. For that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

A mystic thing it looks to Nicodemus, this second birth,—this birth of the Spirit ; secret, invisible, impalpable ; its origin and issues hidden, remote. Marvel not, says Jesus, at its mysteriousness. The night is quiet around you, not a sound of bending branch or rustling leaf comes from the neighboring wood ; but now the air is stirred as by an invisible hand ; the sigh of the night-breeze comes through the bending branches and rustling leaves ; you hear the sound ; but who can take you to that breeze's birthplace, and show you where and how it was begotten ; who can carry you to its place of sepulchre, and show you where and how it died ? Not that the wind—the air in motion,—is a whit more willful or capricious, or less obedient to fixed laws than any other elements, or is chosen upon that account to represent the operations of God's Spirit on the souls of men. All its movements are fixed and orderly ; but as the movements of an invisible agent, they elude our observation ; nor if you sought for a material emblem of that hiddenness with which the Holy Spirit works, could you find in the whole creation one more apt than that which Jesus used, when he said to Nicodemus, " The wind bloweth where it list-

eth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

Already a dim apprehension of that for which he was being apprehended of Christ has begun to dawn upon Nicodemus. He receives the truth as affirmed by Jesus as to the necessity of the new birth. He begins even to understand something as to its nature. Yet a haze still hangs over it. He wonders and he doubts,—giving expression to his feelings in the question, "How can these things be?"

If Christ's answer may be taken as the best interpretation of this question, Nicodemus was now troubling himself not so much either with the nature or the necessity of the new birth, as with the manner of its accomplishment ; the kind of instrumentality by which so great an inward change was to be effected ; for, read aright, our Lord's reply is not only a description of that instrumentality, but an actual employment of it. First, however, a gentle rebuke must be given : Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Hast thou forgotten all that is written in the book of the law and in the prophets, about the com-

ing of those days in which the Lord would pour out his Spirit upon all flesh ; about the new covenant that the Lord would then enter into with his people, one of whose two great provisions was to be this : “ I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you ; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh ? ” (Ezek. xi. 19.) What had so often and so long beforehand been thus spoken of was now about to be executed. The Spirit of God was waiting to do his gracious work, in begetting many sons and daughters to the Lord. Let Nicodemus be assured of this, on the testimony of one whose knowledge of the spirit-world was immediate and complete. He had spoken very confidently about his knowledge of Jesus. We know, he had said, thou art a teacher sent from God. Let him listen now to words of equal confidence, which no mere human teacher, though he were even sent by God, could well, upon such a subject, have employed : “ Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen ; and ye receive not our witness.” “ This work of the Spirit in regenerating is connected with another—my own—in redeeming. The one is but an

earthly operation ; a work performed within men's souls : but the other, how high have you to rise to trace it to its source ; how far to go to follow it to its issues ? “ If I have told you these earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things ?”

‘ And yet who can speak of these heavenly things as I can do ! You take me, Nicodemus, to be a teacher sent from God, perhaps you might even acknowledge me as a prophet ; but know me that I am no other than He, the Son of man, the Son of God, coming down from heaven, ascending to heaven, but leaving not heaven behind me in my descent, bringing it along with me ; while here on earth, being still in heaven. “ No man, I say unto thee, hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.” ’

And having thus proclaimed the ground and certainty of his knowledge of all the earthly and all the heavenly things pertaining to the kingdom, Jesus goes on to preach his own gospel beforehand to Nicodemus, taking the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness, as the type to illustrate his own approaching lifting-up on

the cross, declaring this to be the great and gracious design of his death, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish but have eternal life : “ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son ; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

It does not fall within our scope to illustrate at large or attempt to enforce the great truths about the one and only manner of entering into Christ’s spiritual kingdom ; about the universal need of the Spirit-birth in order to make this entrance ; about his own character and office ; the manner and objects of his death ; the faith which, trusting to him, brings with it everlasting life ; the moral guilt that lies in the act of rejecting him as a Redeemer ; the true character of that temper of mind and heart which prompts to faith on the one side, and to unbelief on the other, which are all brought out in the discourse of our Lord to Nicodemus. But it does fall precisely within our present design that I ask you to reflect a moment or two, —first, upon the Time at which this discourse was delivered ; and next, as to its Effect upon him to whom it was addressed.

It was delivered weeks or months before the

Sermon on the Mount, or any other of Christ's public addresses to the people. Standing in time the first, it stands in character alone. You search in vain through all the subsequent discourses of our Lord for any such clear compendious comprehensive development of the Christian salvation : of its source in the love of the Father ; its channel in the death of his only begotten Son ; and of the great Agent by whom it is appropriated and applied. You search in vain for any other instance in which the three persons of the Trinity were spoken of by our Lord consecutively and conjunctly ; to each being assigned his proper part in the economy of our redemption. It may even be doubted whether in the whole range of the apostolic epistles there be a passage of equal length in which the manner of our salvation through Christ is as fully and distinctly described.

Delivered thus at the very beginning of our Lord's ministry, it utters a loud and unambiguous protest against the error of those who would have us to believe that there was a decided and essential difference between the earlier and later teachings of our Saviour ; between the doctrine taught by Christ, and that

taught afterwards by his apostles. It is quite true, that until within a few months of the final decease accomplished at Jerusalem, our Lord studiously avoided all reference to his death. It is quite true, that, in not a single instance—not even where one would most naturally have expected it—in the prayer that he taught to his disciples,—is there an allusion by Jesus to that death, as supplying the ground of our forgiveness. But that this marked silence is misinterpreted, when it is inferred that he did not assign to it that place and importance given to it afterwards, we have here, in this discourse to Nicodemus, the most convincing proof. I shall have occasion hereafter to refer to those considerations by which our Saviour was obviously influenced during the course of his personal ministry in not publicly unfolding the doctrine of the Cross. Let those, however, who delight to dwell on the simple and pure morality of the Sermon on the Mount, and to contrast it with the doctrinal theology of the apostles, declaring their preference for the teachings of the Master above that of his disciples, but ponder well this first of all our Lord's discourses, and they will see that instead of any conflict there is a perfect harmony.

But if he never afterwards unfolded his gospel so plainly or so fully, why did he do so now ; why reveal so much to Nicodemus that he appears to have withheld from the multitude ? Am I wrong in regarding this as due in part to the very circumstance that this was a nocturnal and a solitary interview with Nicodemus ? No one but this ruler of the Jews may have heard the words that Jesus spake that night, and he would be the last man to go and repeat them to others. There is good reason to believe that the Gospel of St. John was written and published some years after those of the other Evangelists. It is in the Gospel of St. John alone that the interview with Nicodemus is recorded. The other Evangelists appear to have been ignorant of it. How the beloved disciple came to his knowledge of it, it is not necessary for us to inquire. He may have received it from the lips of Nicodemus himself. Enough for us to know that it was not currently reported in the Church till St. John gave it circulation. At any rate we may be sure that it remained unknown all through the period of our Lord's own life. It was not, then, in violation of the rule that he acted on afterwards that he spoke now so

plainly and fully as he did to Nicodemus. It was a rare opportunity, one that never perhaps returned, to have before him one so qualified by capacity, by acquirement, by honesty, by earnestness to receive the truth, and the very manner in which the Saviour hastened to reveal it, is to us the proof that he saw good soil here into which to cast the seed, and the proof too how grateful to him the office of his hand in sowing it.

He knew indeed that the seed then sown was long to be dormant. For three years there was no token of its germination. Nicodemus never sought a second interview with Jesus, but kept studiously aloof. Once, indeed, and it is the only sight throughout three years that we get of him, he ventured to say a word in the Council against a hasty arrest and condemnation of Jesus, but he met with such a sharp rebuff that he never opened his lips again. The memorable words, however, of the midnight meeting at Jerusalem had not been forgotten. There was much in them that he could not understand. Who was He who had spoken of himself as the Son of man, the Son of God; of his ascending and descending to and from heaven; of being in heaven even when he

stood there on earth? He had spoken of his being lifted up, that men might believe in him, and, believing, might not perish, but have everlasting life. What could that lifting up of Jesus be, and how upon it could there hang such issues? Much to perplex here, yet much to stimulate ; for that life, that eternal life, of which Christ had spoken, was the very life that above all things he was longing to possess and realize. In this troubled state of mind and heart, with what an anxious eye would Nicodemus watch the after-current of our Lord's history! For a year and a half he had disappeared from Judea ; was heard of only as saying and doing wonders down in Galilee. Then came the final visit to the capital, the great commotion in the Temple, the raising of Lazarus, the seizure, the trial, the condemnation. Was Nicodemus present, with the rest of that Council of which he was a member, on the morning of the crucifixion? If he was, he must ingloriously have kept silence, for the vote was unanimous. I would rather believe, from what happened on the after part of that day, that he was not present, did not obey the hasty summons. With him or without him, the verdict is given. The license to crucify is ex-

torted from the vacillating Governor ; the cross is raised.

At last, the words that three years before had sounded in the ruler's listening ear, and which had since been frequently recalled, the mystery of their meaning unrevealed, are verified and explained. The cross is raised ; Jesus is lifted up. The darkened heavens, the reeling earth, the prayer for his crucifiers, the promise to the penitent who dies beside him, the voice of triumph at the close, proclaim the death of that only begotten Son of God, whom He had given to be the Saviour of the world. The scales drop off from the eyes they so long had covered. Fear goes out, and faith comes into Nicodemus' breast, a faith that plants him by Joseph's side in the garden, and unites their hands in the rendering of the last services to the body, which they buried in the new sepulchre.

What a flood of light fell then on the hitherto mysterious words of the Crucified ; what a rich treasure of comfort would the meditation of them unfold all his life long afterwards to Nicodemus ; and what an honor to him that he was chosen as the man to whom were first addressed those words which have comforted so

many millions since, and are destined to comfort so many millions more in the years that are to come : “ God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life !”

XIV.

THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA.*

COMING, as he did, to a community that had long been accustomed to act in its corporate capacity as a nation in covenant with God; coming to be nationally received or nationally rejected as the Messiah; a reception or rejection which could only be embodied in some decisive expression of the will of the nation, made through its authorized heads and representatives,—our natural expectation is that Christ's public manifestation of himself would be made principally in Judea and at Jerusalem. And the actual opening of his public ministry convinces us that had no check or hindrance been interposed, had any readiness been shown by the rulers of the people to look favorably on his character and claims, Judea and Jerusalem would have been the

* John iv.

chief scene of his labors. For before he opened his lips as a teacher sent from God, to any Galilean audience or in any provincial synagogue, he presented himself in the capital, and by a bold and striking act, fitted to draw all eyes upon him, asserted his authority within the Temple, as the house of his Father, which it became him to cleanse. The bold beginning was well sustained both by word and deed, but no favorable impression was made. The only one of the Rulers who made any approach came to him by night, and went away to lock up deep within his breast the wonderful revelation that was made to him. Jesus retired from Jerusalem, but lingered still in Judea, spending the summer months which succeeded the Pass-over in some district of the country, not far from that in which John was baptizing.* It seems strange to us that after the sign from heaven had been given that the greater than he had appeared, instead of joining himself to Jesus, as one of his disciples, John should have kept aloof, and continued baptizing, preserving

* As yet all attempts have failed to identify the *Ænon* near Salim, to which from the banks of the Jordan John had now removed. It will, in all probability, be discovered somewhere northeast of Jerusalem, so situated that the way from it into Galilee lay naturally through Samaria.

thus a separate following of his own. And it seems equally strange, that now for a short time, and for this short time only, our Lord's disciples—the men who had voluntarily attached themselves to him, none of whom had as yet been separated from their earthly callings, or set apart as those through whom a new order of things was to be instituted—should also have engaged in baptizing, if not at the suggestion, yet by the permission and under the sanction of their Master. Whatever reasons we may assign for the separate baptisms of John and Jesus being for this short season contemporaneously sustained, they serve to bring out fully and in striking contrast the character and disposition towards Jesus of the Pharisees on the one hand, and of the Baptist on the other. At first, in Judea as in Galilee, the common people heard Christ gladly, and came in great numbers to be baptized. This for the Pharisees is a new matter of offence, out of which, however, they construct an implement of mischief, which they hasten to employ. There can be little doubt that the question which arose between John's disciples and the Jews was stirred by the latter, had respect to the relative value of the two baptisms, and was intended to

sow the seeds of dissension between the two discipleships. Fresh from the dispute, and heated by it, some of John's disciples came to him, and said unto him, evidently with the tone of men complaining of a grievance by which their feelings have been hurt: "Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou bearest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him."

We may be all ready enough to acknowledge the superiority of another to ourselves in regard to qualities or acts in which we never sought for prominence or praise. Even as to those qualities and acts in which we may have ourselves excelled, we may not be unwilling to confess the superiority of another, provided that we do not come into direct comparison with him, in presence of those who embody the expression of their preference in some marked piece of conduct. But it does subject our weak nature to an extreme trial when, by his side, in the very region in which he has attained extraordinary and unlooked for success, a man sees another rise whose success so far outstrips his own as to throw it wholly into the shade. Remember, now, that the Baptist was but a man, with all the common infirmities of our

nature clinging to him ; that up to the time he had baptized Jesus, his course had been one of unparalleled popularity ; that from that time the tide of the popular favor began to ebb away from him, and to rise around this other, till at last he hears the tidings, He baptizeth, and all men now go to him. And then, listen to his answer to the complaint of his disciples : “ A man,” he said, “ can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.” ‘This growing baptism of Jesus, this lesser baptism of mine, are both as Heaven has willed. The multitudes that once flocked to me were sent by God ; the power which I had over them I got from God ; and if the Lord who sent and gave is pleased now to withdraw them from me, to bestow them upon another, still will I adore his name. Nor is it bare submission to his will I cherish. I hear of and I rejoice at the success of Christ. “Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom : but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. This my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.”’ Rare and

beautiful instance of an unenvying humility! all the rarer and more beautiful as occurring not in one of weak and gentle nature, but in a character of masculine energy, in which are often to be found only the stronger passions of humanity. A rare and beautiful sight it is to see the gentle Jonathan not only give way to David, as successor to his father's kingdom, but content to stand by David's side, and live under the shadow of his throne ; but a rarer, I believe, and still more beautiful thing it is to see the strong-willed Baptist not only make room for Jesus, but rejoice that his own light, which had "shone out so brilliantly, enlightening for a season the whole Jewish heavens, faded away and sunk out of sight in the beams of the rising Sun of righteousness." And John's final testimony upon this occasion to the character and office of Jesus is as striking as the involuntary display that he makes of his own character, going much beyond what he had said before, and containing much that bears a singular likeness to what Jesus had shortly before said of himself to Nicodemus : "He that cometh from above is above all ; he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth ; he that cometh from heaven is above all : and what

he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth ; and no man receiveth his testimony. He that hath received his testimony hath set-to his seal that God is true. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God : for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life : and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life ; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”*

Such was the testimony elicited from John on being told of the large concourse of people which had gathered round Jesus and his disciples. Very different was the effect which this intelligence produced in Jerusalem. It fanned the hostile feeling already kindled in the breasts of the Pharisees. How that feeling might have manifested itself had Jesus continued in Judea, his disciples gone on baptizing, and the people kept flocking to them, we cannot tell. As from one quarter there burst about this time on the head of John the storm that closed his public career, so from another quarter might a storm have burst on the head of Jesus with like effect.

* John iii.

Foreseeing the peril to which he might be exposed, Jesus, "when he knew how the Pharisees had heard that he made and baptized more disciples than John, left Judea and departed again into Galilee." His nearest and most direct route lay through the central district of Samaria. This district was inhabited by people of a foreign origin, and with a somewhat curious history. When the king of Assyria carried the Ten Tribes into captivity, it is said that, in order to fill the void which their exile created, he brought "men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they possessed Samaria and dwelt in the cities thereof."* These certainly were idolaters, worshippers of a strange medley of divinities, and brought with them their old faiths to their new home. Shortly after their settlement, a frightful plague visited them, and it occurred to themselves, or was suggested by the neighboring Israelites, that it had fallen upon them because of their not worshipping the old divinity of the place. In their alarm they sent an embassy to

* 2 Kings xvii. 24.

their monarch, who, either humoring or sharing their fears, sent one of the captive Jewish priests to instruct them in the Israëlitish faith. This faith they at once accepted and professed, combining it with their old idolatries: "They feared the Lord," we are told, "and served their graven images."* Gradually, however, they were weaned from their ancient superstitions. When, under the decree of Cyrus, the captives of Judah and Benjamin, returning from Babylon, set about rebuilding the Temple at Jerusalem, the Samaritans proposed to join them in the work. The proposal was haughtily rejected, and that rejection was the first of a long series of disputes. A fresh ground of offence arose when Manasseh, a grandson of one, and brother of another High Priest, had, contrary to the laws and customs of the Jews, married a daughter of Sanballat, the governor of the province of Samaria. Called upon to renounce this alliance and repudiate his wife, Manasseh, rather than do so, fled from Jerusalem, and put himself under the protection of his father-in-law. A considerable number of the Jews who were dissatisfied with the great strictness with which Nehemiah was adminis-

* 2 Kings xvii. 24.

tering affairs at Jerusalem, followed him. The Samaritans, thus strengthened in numbers, and having now a member of one of the highest families of the priesthood among them, erected a rival temple on Mount Gerizim, and set up there a ritual of worship in strict accordance with the Mosaic institute. Their history from this time to the time of Christ is a very chequered one. Their territory was invaded by John Hyrcanus, one of the family of the Maccabees, who plundered their capital, and razing the stately temple on Mount Gerizim from its foundations, left it a heap of ruins, so that when Jesus passed that way, an altar reared on these ruins was all that Gerizim could boast.

Notwithstanding all these vicissitudes, and all the harsh hostilities to which they were exposed, the Samaritans became purer and purer in their faith till all relics of their Medo-Persian idolatries had disappeared. They received, as of Divine authority, the five Books of Moses, the Pentateuch, but they rejected all the books of history and prophecies which followed, and which were full, as the Jews believed, of intimations of the future subjection of the whole world to Israelitish sway, and the establishment

of Jerusalem, as the central place of worship, and the seat of universal empire.

But though the Jews despised the Samaritans as a people of a mixed origin and a mutilated faith, and the Samaritans repaid the contempt, we are not to think that the two communities lived so much apart that there was no traffic or intercourse between them. There was little or no interchange of kindly or social feeling ; but it was quite within the limits of the common usage for the disciples to go into a Samaritan town, to buy bread for themselves and their Master by the way.

Their morning's walk had carried Jesus and his disciples across or along the plain of Mukhna to the entrance of that narrow valley which lies between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim. Here, upon a spur of the latter height, which runs out into the plain, was Jacob's Well,—the town of Sychar, the ancient Shechem, the modern Nablous lying about a mile and a half away, up in the valley, at the base of Gerizim. It was the sixth hour—our twelve o'clock—and the Syrian sun glared hotly upon the travellers. Wearied with the heat of the day and the toil of the morning, Jesus sat down by the well-side, while his disciples went on to Sychar to

make the necessary purchases. As Jesus is sitting by the well alone, a woman of Samaria approaches. He fixes his eye upon her as she comes near ; watches her as she proceeds to draw the water, waiting till the full pitcher is upon the well-mouth, and then says to her, "Give me to drink." He is a Jew ; she knows it by his dress and speech. Yet, as one willing to be indebted to her, he asks a favor at her hands ; a favor for which, if his looks do not belie him, he will be grateful. Not as one unwilling to grant the favor, but surprised at its being asked, her answer is : "How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, who am a woman of Samaria ?" He will answer this question, but not in the way that she expects. The manner of his dispensation of the great gift he came from heaven to bestow stands embodied in the words : "Thou wouldst have asked, and I would have given thee the living water."*

The woman has taken him to be a common

* There is no doubt that the well still shown to travellers near Nablous, is the well of Jacob. Its position near to Sychar : its importance as inferred from its dimensions, being a well of nine feet in diameter and seventy-five in depth : cut out of the solid rock, with sides hewn and smooth as Jacob's servant's may be sup-

Jew, an ordinary wayfarer, whom thirst and the fatigue of travel have overcome, forcing him

posed to have left them,—go far, of themselves, to determine its identity; and the conclusion is confirmed by an undivided, unbroken tradition,—Jewish, Samaritan, Arabian, Turkish, Christian.

Besides the absence of all doubt as to its identity, there is another circumstance which surrounds it with a peculiar sacredness. It is the one and only limited and well defined locality in Palestine that you can connect with the presence of the Redeemer. You cannot in all Palestine draw another circle of limited diameter within whose circumference you can be absolutely certain that Jesus once stood, except round Jacob's Well. I had the greatest possible desire to tread that circle round and round, to sit here and there and everywhere around that well-mouth; that I might gratify a long-cherished wish. But never was disappointment greater than the one which I experienced when I reached the spot. Close by it in early Christian times, they built a church, whose ruins now cover the ground in its immediate neighborhood. Over the well itself they erected a vaulted arch, through a small opening in which, travellers, a hundred years ago, crept down into a chamber ten feet square, which left but a narrow margin on which to stand and look down into the well. This vaulted covering has now fallen in, choking up so completely the mouth of the well, that it is only here and there, through apertures between the blocks of stone, that you can find an entrance into the well. I speak of it as I found it last year. It must have been more accessible to travellers even a few years ago; but year by year the rubbish that is constantly being thrown into it accumulates, and the opening at the top is becoming more closed. The Mussulmans of the neighborhood, seeing the respect in which it is held by Christians, appear to take a pleasure in obstructing and defiling it. You cannot sit, then, by Jacob's Well, or walk around it, or look down into its waters. It is stated upon good authority, that recently the well, and the site around it, have been purchased by

perhaps unwillingly to ask for water to drink. He will fix her attention upon himself; he will stir up her feminine curiosity by telling her that he who asks has something on his part to give; that if she only knew who he was, and what that living water was which he had at command, instead of stopping to inquire why he had asked water of her, she would be asking it of him, and what she asked he without question would have given. Living water!—better water than that which she has in her pitcher. Could it be by going deeper down, and getting nearer to the bubbling spring beneath, that he could get such water, or was it water of superior quality from some other well than this of Jacob. Sir, she says, addressing him with awakening interest and an increasing respect: “Sir,” she says, in her ignorance and confusion, “thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?” Her

the Russian Church. Let us hope that they will clear away all the stones and rubbish, and leave it clear and open, as Jesus found it, when, weary and way-worn, he sat down beside it.

thoughts are wandering away back to the first drinkers at this well, when its waters first burst out in their freshness, imagining that it must be of them, or of the water of some other neighboring well, that this stranger had been speaking. Again, waiving as before all direct reply to her question, Jesus with increased solemnity says : " Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again : but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst ; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." It is not this water, then ; it is no common water ; it is water that this man alone can give ; water which is not to be taken in draughts, with which you may quench your thirst now, and then wait till the thirst comes back again ere another draught be taken ; but water of which a man should constantly be drinking, and if he did so would be constantly satisfied, so that there would be no recurring intervals of desire and gratification,—this water as received turning into a well within the man himself, springing up into everlasting life. Beginning to understand a little, seeing this at least, that it was of some element altogether different from any water that she had ever

tasted, yet clinging still to the notion that it must be some kind of material water that he means,—she says: “Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.”

One part of Christ’s object has now been gained; he has awakened not an idle, but a very eager curiosity; he has forced the woman’s attention on himself as having some great benefit in his hand which he is not unwilling to bestow. Through a figurative description of what this benefit is, he will not or cannot carry her further at present. Abruptly breaking the conversation off at this point, he says to her: “Go, *call thy husband*, and come hither.” With great frankness she says, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “Thou hast well said, thou hast no husband, for thou hast had five husbands, and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband; in that saidst thou truly.” In the past domestic history of this woman there had been much that was peculiar, though up to the last connexion she had formed there may not have been anything that was sinful. Christ’s object, however, was not so much to convict her of bygone or existing guilt, as to convince her that he was in full possession of all the secrets of her past life, and so to create

within her a belief in his more than human insight. Not so much as one overwhelmed with the sense of shame, but rather as one surprised into a new belief as to the character and capabilities of the stranger who addresses her, she replies, "Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet." If she had been a woman of an utterly abandoned character, whose whole bygone life had been one series of flagrant offences, whose conscience, long seared with iniquity, Christ was now trying to quicken,—very curious would it appear that so soon as the quickening came, waiving all questions about her own character, she should so instantly have put the question about the true place of religious worship, whether here at Gerizim, or there at Jerusalem.

There may have been an attempt to parry conviction, and to turn aside the hand of the convincer, by raising questions about places and forms of worship ; but I cannot think, had this been the spirit and motive of this woman's inquiries, that Jesus would have dealt with them as he did ; for, treating them evidently as the earnest inquiries of one wishing to be instructed, assuming all the dignity of that office which had been attributed to him, he says to her :

Woman, believe me, the hour cometh—(I speak as one before whose eye the whole history of the future stands revealed ; the hour cometh,—I came myself into the world to bring it on)—when that strong bias to worship, that lies so deep in the hearts of men, shall have found at last its one only true and worthy object in that God and Father of all, who made all, and who loves all, and has sent me to reveal him to all ; when, stripped of all the restraints that have hitherto confined it to a single people, a single country, a single town ; relieved of all the supports that were required by it in its weak and tottering childhood,—the spirit of a true piety shall go forth in freedom over the globe, seeking for those—whatever be the places they choose, the outward forms that they adopt,—for those who will adore and love and serve him in spirit and in truth, and wherever it finds them, owning them as the true worshippers of the Father. Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when neither in this mountain nor yet in Jerusalem, nor here, nor there, nor anywhere exclusively, shall men worship the Father. “ God is a Spirit ; and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.” The newness, the breadth, the sub-

limity, if not also the truth of his teaching, at once suggested to the mind of the listener the thought of that Messiah for whom every Samaritan and Jew alike were looking. I know, she said, that Messias cometh. When he is come he will tell us all things. Jesus saith to her : " I that speak to thee am he."

Why was it that that which he so long and studiously concealed from the Jewish people, that which he so strictly enjoined his disciples not to make known to them, was thus so simply, clearly and directly told ? In the woman herself to whom the wonderful revelation was made, there may have been much to draw it forth. The gentle surprise with which she meets the request of the Jewish stranger ; the expression of respect she uses so soon as he begins to speak of God, and some gift of his she might enjoy ; her guileless confession when once she found she was actually in a prophet's presence : her instant readiness to believe that Jew though he was—apparently of no note or mark among his brethren—he was yet a prophet ; her eager question about the most acceptable way of worshipping the Most High ; the quick occurrence of the coming Messiah to her thoughts ; the full, confiding, generous

faith, that she once reposed in him when he said, I that speak unto thee am he : her forgetfulness of her individual errand to the well ; her leaving her pitcher there behind her ; her running into the city to call all the men of Sychar, saying, Come, see a man who told me all things that ever I did, is not this the Christ?—all conspire to convince us that, sinful though she was, she was hungering and thirsting after righteousness, waiting for the consolation of Israel, we trust prepared to hail the Saviour when he stood revealed.

But besides her individual character, there was also the circumstance that she was a Samaritan. It is the first time that Jesus comes into close, private, personal contact with one who is not of the seed of Israel ; for though she claimed Jacob as her father, neither this woman nor any of the tribe she belonged to, were of Jewish descent. “I am not come,” said Jesus, afterwards defining the general boundaries of his personal ministry, “but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” When he sent out the Seventy, his instructions to them were : “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not.” And yet there were a few occasions, and this is the

first of them, in which Christ broke through the restraints under which it pleased him ordinarily to act. I believe that there are just four instances of this kind recorded in the Saviour's life: that of the woman of Samaria, of the Roman Centurion, of the Canaanitish woman, of the Greeks who came up to Jerusalem. All these were instances of our Lord's dealings with those who stood without the pale of Judaism, and as we come upon them in the narrative, we shall be struck with the singular interest which Jesus took in each; the singular care that he bestowed in testing and bringing out to view the simplicity and strength of the desire towards him, and faith in him, that were displayed; the fullness of the revelations of himself that he made, and of that satisfaction and delight with which he contemplated the issue. It was the great and good Shepherd, stretching out his hand across the fence, and gathering in a lamb or two from the outfields, in token of the truth that there were other sheep which were out of the Jewish fold, whom also he was in due time to bring in, so that there should be one fold and one shepherd.

Our idea, that it was this circumstance,—her Samaritan nationality,—which lent such inter-

est, in our Saviour's own regard, to his interview with this woman by the well-side, is confirmed by casting a glance at its result. Jesus at their entreaty turned aside, and abode two days with the Sycharites. You read of no sign or wonder wrought, no miracle performed, save that miracle of knowledge which won the woman's faith. Though no part of it is recorded, his teaching for those few days in Sychar was, in its general character, like to his teaching by the well-mouth, and on the ground alone of the truthfulness, the simplicity, the purity, the spirituality, and the sublimity of that teaching, many believed on him, declaring they knew that this was indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.

The phrase is so familiar to the Christian ear, that we may fail to mark its singularity as coming from the lips of these rude Samaritans. No Saviour this for Jew alone, or Samaritan alone ; for any one age or country. Not his the work to deliver from mere outward thrall-dom, to establish either in Jerusalem or elsewhere any temporal kingdom : his the wider and more glorious office to emancipate the human spirit, and be its guide to the Father of the spirits of all flesh. Compare the notions which

these simple villagers had of the Messiah, with those prevalent among the Jews ; compare with them any of the most intelligent of our Lord's apostles up to the day of Pentecost, and your very wonder might create doubt, did you not remember that it was not from the books of Daniel and Zechariah and Ezekiel, the books from which the Jews by false interpretations derived their ideas of the Messiah's character and reign, that the Samaritans derived theirs, but from the Pentateuch alone, the five books of Moses ; and when you turn to the latter, and look at the prophecies regarding Christ which they contain, you will find that the two things about him to which they point,—that he should be a prophet sent from God, and that his office should have respect to all mankind, that to him should the gathering of the people be, and that in him should all families of the earth be blessed,—were the very two things that the faith of these Samaritans embraced when they said, “ We know that this is indeed the Christ, *the Saviour of the world.*”

The conversation by the well, the two fruitful days at Sychar, what is the general lesson that they convey ? That wherever Christ finds an opening listening ear, he has glad tidings

that he is ready to pour into it; that wherever he finds a thirsting soul, he has living waters with which he delights to quench its thirst; that to all who are truly seeking him, he drops disguise, and says, "Behold, even I that speak unto you, am he;" that wherever he finds minds and hearts longing after a revelation of the Father, and the true mode of worshipping him, to such is the revelation given. Had you but stood by Jacob's well, and seen the look of Jesus, and listened to the tones of his voice; or had you been in Sychar during those two bright and happy days, hearing the instructions so freely given, so gratefully received, you would have had the evidence of sense to tell you with what abounding joy to all who are waiting and who are willing, Jesus breaks the bread and pours out the water of everlasting life. Multiplied a thousandfold is the evidence to the same effect now offered to the eye and ear of faith. Still from the lips of the Saviour of the world, over all the world the words are sounding forth: "If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink." Still the manner of his dispensation of the great gift stands embodied in the words: "Thou wouldst have asked, and I would have given thee the living

water." And still these other voices are heard catching up and re-echoing our Lord's own gracious invitation: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

XV.

THE JEWISH NOBLEMAN AND THE ROMAN CENTURION.*

SEATED by the side of Jacob's well, and seeing the Samaritan woman draw water out of it, Jesus seizes on the occasion to discourse to her of the water of life. So soon as she hears from his own lips that he is the Messiah, this woman leaves her water-pot behind her, and hurries into the neighboring city to announce to others the great discovery which has been made to her. She has scarcely left the Saviour's side, ere his disciples present themselves with the bread which they had bought in Sychar, offering it, and saying to him, "Master, eat." But, as if hunger had gone from him, and he cared not now for food, he answers, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." Wondering at his manner, his appear-

* John iv. 46-54 ; Luke vii. 1-10.

ance, his speech, so different from what they had expected, the disciples say to one another—it is the only explanation that occurs to them—“Hath any man brought him ought to eat?” Correcting the false conception, our Lord replies: “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” He had been eating that meat, he had been doing that will, while they were away; and so grateful had it been to him to be so engaged, so happy had he been in instructing a solitary woman, and sending her away, in full belief in his Messiahship, to go and bring others to him, that, in the joy of a spirit whose first desire had been granted to it, the bodily appetite ceases to solicit, and the hunger of an hour ago is no longer felt. She is gone, but already foreseeing all, he anticipates her return,—hears and acts upon the invitation given,—has the fruit of these two productive days at Sychar before his eyes, looking upon the few sheaves then gathered in as the first-fruits of a still wider, richer harvest. The idea of that harvest filling his mind, he looks over the fields around him, and blending the natural and the spiritual together, he says to his disciples: “Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest?

Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal : that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth." How many contrasts as well as analogies between the husbandry of nature and the husbandry of grace do these words set forth ! The sower in the fields of nature has always four months to wait ; such is the interval in Palestine between seed-time and harvest. In those other fields in which Jesus is the chief sower, as in the very corner of them at Sychar, sometimes the seed has scarcely sunk into the soil ere it springs up ready for the reaper's hands. Then not seldom the ploughman overtakes the reaper, and the reapers and the sowers go on together. And yet there is often, too, an interval ; nor is it always even generally true that it is he who sows who reaps. Nowhere is the common proverb, that one soweth and another reapeth, oftener verified than here. In the spiritual domain it is the lot of some to do little else all their lives than sow, to sow long and laboriously without seeing any fields whitening unto the

harvest ; it is the lot of others to have little else to do than gather in the fruits of others' labors ; or, looking at the broad history of the world and of the church, can we not mark certain epochs which we would particularly characterize as times of sowing, others as times of reaping, sometimes separated by wide intervals, sometimes running rapidly into one another ? But whether they be the same or different agents that are employed in the sowing and in the reaping ; whether longer space intervene, or the sowing and the reaping go together, one thing is true, that when the harvest cometh, and the everlasting life, towards which all the labor has been tending, is reached, then shall there be a great and mutual rejoicing,—the gladness of those to whom it is given to see that their labor has not been in vain in the Lord.

It has always been a question whether there was any allusion made or intended by Christ to the actual condition of the fields around him as he spake. I cannot but think, though it be in opposition to the judgment of some of our first scholars, that there was. Jesus was speaking at the time when there were as yet four months unto the harvest. If it were so, then we have

good ground for settling at what period of the year this visit of our Lord to Sychar took place. The harvest in Palestine begins about the middle of April. Four months back from that time carries us to the middle of December, the Jewish seed-time. If so, the interval between the first Passover at which our Lord had his conversation with Nicodemus, which took place, as we know, at the commencement of the early harvest, and the conversation with the woman of Samaria, an interval of no less than eight months, were spent by Jesus in Judea, giving to the rulers of the people a privileged opportunity of considering Christ's character and claims. Nothing but disappointment, neglect, indifference, or alienation, having been manifested, Jesus retired to Galilee, taking Samaria by the way. The two days at Sychar presented a striking contrast to his reception in Judea. How will they stand in comparison with the reception that awaits him in Galilee?

Cana lies farther north than Nazareth. The road to the one would lead close to, if not through the other. On this occasion Jesus appears to have passed by Nazareth. Perhaps it was to avoid such a reception as he knew to be

awaiting him there, or it may have been simply because Mary and the family had shifted their residence, and were now living near their relatives at Cana. The rumor of the first miracle which he had wrought there some months before may have spread widely in the neighborhood. It was done, however, so quietly, and in such a hidden manner, that one can well conceive of different versions of it going abroad. It was different with those reports which the Galileans who had been up at the last Passover brought back from Jerusalem. Our Lord's miracles there, whatever they were, were done openly ; many had believed because of them. The Galileans who were at the feast had seen them all, and on their return home had filled the country with the noise of them, all the more gratified, perhaps, that he who had drawn all eyes upon him at Jerusalem was one of themselves. And now it is told abroad that he has come back from Judea and is at Cana.

The tidings reach the ear of a nobleman in Capernaum, a Jew of high birth connected with the court of Herod Antipas, at the very time that a grievous malady is on his son, and has brought him to the very brink of death. He had not heard, perhaps, that Jesus had restored

the dying to health ; so far as we know, the healing of his son may have been the first miracle of that kind which Jesus wrought ; but he has heard of his turning the water into wine, he has heard of the wonders wrought at Jerusalem. He by whom such miracles had been done should be able to rebuke disease. It is at least worth trying whether he will or can. The distance to Cana is but a short one, some twenty miles or so. He will send no servant, he will go himself, and make the trial. He went, saw Jesus, told him his errand, and besought him that he would come down and heal his son. Why was it that before Jesus made any reply, or gave any indication of his purpose, he said, as the fruit of some deep inward thought which the application had suggested, "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe?" It was because he saw all that was in that man, all the motives by which he had been prompted to this visit ; the strong affection for his son, which Jesus will not rebuke ; his willingness to be at any pains on his behalf, to seek help from any quarter ; his partial faith in Christ's power to help—for without some faith of this description, he would not have come at all ; yet the absence of all deeper faith springing from a sense of

spiritual disease, which should have brought the man to Jesus for himself as well as for his son, and which should have taught him to look to Jesus as the healer of the soul. It was because he saw in this nobleman a specimen of his countrymen at large, and in his application a type and prelude of the multitude of like applications afterwards to be made to him.

It may have served to suggest this the more readily to Christ's thoughts, and give the greater intensity to the emotion excited within his breast, that he had just come from Sychar, where so many had believed in him without any sign or wonder done, believed in him as a teacher sent from God, believed in him as the Messiah promised to their fathers.. What a contrast between those simple-minded, simple-hearted, Samaritans, whose love and wonder, faith and penitence, joy and gratitude had been so quickly, so purely, so exclusively awakened, and this nobleman of Capernaum and his Galilean fellow-countrymen! We know that Jesus never returned to Sychar, though he must more than once have passed near to it on his way to and from Jerusalem. We know that he gave positive instructions to the seventy to go into no city of the Samaritans. It was in

fulfillment of his design that his personal ministry should be confined to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, that he laid this restraint upon himself and his disciples. But can we think that it cost him no self-denial, that it was with no inward pang that Jesus turned away from those who showed themselves so willing to receive, to those who were for ever asking a sign from heaven, and who, "after he had done so many miracles, yet believed not in him?" (John xii. 37.) Why was it, then, that when the Pharisees came forth, and began to question him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, "he sighed deeply in his spirit, and said, Why doth this generation seek after a sign?" (Mark viii. 12.) The deep sigh came from the depth of a spirit moved and grieved at this incessant craving for outward seals and vouchers, this unwillingness to believe in him simply on the ground of his character and his doctrine. Though he did not meet the peculiar demand of the Pharisees, who, unsatisfied even with his other works, sought from him a special sign from heaven, our Lord, we know, was lavish in the performance of miracles, supplied willingly and largely that ground of faith which they afforded, appealed often and openly

to the proof of his divine mission which they supplied. Yet all this is consistent with his deploring the necessity which required such a kind of evidence to be supplied, and his mourning over that state of the human spirit out of which the necessity arose. "The works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works."* Such was Christ's language openly addressed to the rulers of the people at Jerusalem. Nor was it differently that he spoke to his disciples in private: "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake."† Jesus would rather have been believed in without the works, would rather that he had not had the works to do in order to win the faith. It is not, then, a faith in the reality of miracles, nor in him simply as the worker of them, nor in anything he was or said or did that rests exclusively upon his having performed them, which constitutes that deeper faith in himself to which it is his supreme desire to conduct us. And when we read of Jesus sighing when signs

* John v. 36; x. 37, 38.

† John xiv. 11.

were asked, and sighing as miracles were wrought by him, we cannot interpret his sighing otherwise than as the expression of the profound grief of his spirit over those who are so little alive to the more spiritual evidence that his character and works carried along with them, as to need to have these outward props and buttresses supplied. There are two different kinds of faith—that which you put in what another is, or in what another has said, because of your own personal knowledge of him and your perception of the intrinsic truthfulness of his sayings, and that which you cherish because of certain external vouchers for his truthfulness that he presents. Jesus invites us to put both these kinds of faith in him, but the latter and the lower in order to lead on to the former and the higher, the real abiding life-giving faith in Him as the Saviour of our souls.

“Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.” We are scarcely surprised that the nobleman of Capernaum, when his eager entreaty was met in this way, by the utterance of so broad an aphorism, should have felt somewhat disappointed and chagrined. There was some hope for him, indeed, had he reflected on it, in the words that Christ had used ; for if

Jesus had not meant to do this sign and wonder, he would not have spoken as he did. But the father is in no mood to take up and weigh the worth and meaning of Christ's words. What he wants is that Christ should go down with him immediately to Capernaum ; he has some hope, that if there, he may be able to cure his son. He has no idea of a healing wrought at a distance, effected at Cana by a word of the Lord's power, an act of the Lord's will. "Sir," he says, "come down ere my child die:" a tinge of impatience, perhaps of pride, yet full of the good compensatory element, strong parental love. "Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way ; thy son liveth." It is the first time, it is one of the few instances in which Jesus stood face to face with earthly rank and power. Perhaps this nobleman presumed on his position, when he said, with something of an imperative tone, "Sir, come down ere my child die." If so, he must have been not a little astonished to find the tone of command rolled back upon him thus : "Go thy way, thy son liveth." How high above the nobility of earth rises the royalty of heaven ! This is the style and manner of Him who saith, and it is done ; who commandeth, and creation through

out all its borders obeys. None ever did such works on earth as Jesus did ; none ever did them in such a simple, easy, unaffected manner ; the manner becoming one who was exerting not a delegated but a native power.

The manner and the substance of the declaration told alike at once upon the nobleman. It satisfied him that the end of his visit was gained. He believed in the word of Jesus, that the death he dreaded was not to come upon his son, that the child he loved so tenderly was to be spared to him. How exactly this had been brought about he did not as yet know. Whether the cure had been instantaneous and complete, or whether the crisis of it had passed, and the recovery had begun ; whether it had been by his possession of a superhuman knowledge, or by his exercise of a superhuman power, that Jesus had been able to announce to him the fact, "Thy son liveth,"—he neither stayed, nor did he venture to ask any explanation. It was enough for him to be assured of the fact, and there was something in the manner in which that *Go thy way* had been spoken, which forbade delay. He meets his servants by the way, bearers of glad tidings. With them he can use all freedom. He asks all

about the cure, and learns that it had not been slowly but instantaneously that the fever had gone, and at the time at which it had done so was the very time at which these words of Jesus, "Thy son liveth," had been spoken at Cana. He had gone out to that village but half a believer in Christ's power in any way to help, limiting that power so much in his conception that it had never once occurred to him that Jesus could do anything for him unless he saw the child. But now he feels that he has been standing in the presence of One, the extent of whose power he had as much underrated as the depth and the tenderness of his love. Awe, conviction, gratitude, fill his soul. A double sign and wonder has been done in Israel. A child has been cured of a fever at Capernaum by one standing miles away at Cana, and a father has been cured of his unbelief,—the same kind of power that banished the disease from the body of the one, banishing distrust from the heart of the other.

How far above all that he had ever asked! His child was dying when the father left Capernaum, was still nearer death when he arrived at Cana; had Jesus done what the father wanted, and gone down with him to Caper-

naum, his son might have been dead ere they got there. The word of power is spoken, and just as the disease is clasping its victim in a last embrace, it has to relax its grasp, take wings and fly away. The father has gone unselfishly, affectionately, on an errand of love, seeking simply his child's life, not asking or caring to get anything himself from Christ. But now in this Jesus he recognizes a higher and greater than a mere healer of the body : spiritual life is breathed into his own soul. Nor is this all ; he returns to Capernaum to tell all the wonders of the cure ; tells them to the healed child, who also believes,—and strange would be the meeting afterwards between that child and Jesus,—he tells them to the other members of his family, and each in turn believes. He himself believed, and with him all his house,—the first whole household brought into the Christian fold.

Let us compare for a moment this case with that of the Centurion. Both plead for others ; the one for his child, the other for his servant, and the pleading of both is signally successful ; the compliance prompt and generous. Such honor does Jesus put on all kindly intercession with him on behalf of those to whom we are

bound by ties of relationship and affection. In both the cases, too, Christ adopts the unusual method of curing at a distance, curing by a word. But the treatment of the two applicants is different; suited to the state, the character, the necessities of each. The one's faith is limited and weak, and needs to be expanded and strengthened; the other's is strong, and waits only to be exhibited in combination with that humility which covers it as with a crown of glory. The one man, little knowing what Christ can do for him, and impatient at what looks like a repulse, says in his haste, Sir, come down ere my child die. The other, having a boundless faith in Jesus, ventures not at first to prescribe any special mode of cure, but contents himself with sending some elders of the Jews to ask that Christ's healing power should be exercised on behalf of his servant. Jesus goes not with him who asks him to do so, having a far greater thing to do for him than to comply with his request. But he no sooner gets the message delivered by deputy from the other, than he says, I will come and heal him, and sets off instantly on the errand. But he knew that he should be arrested by the way. He knew that the Roman Centurion had such

a sense of his own unworthiness that he shrank from receiving him into his house; he knew that he had such confidence in his power, that all he wanted was that Jesus should will it and his servant should be cured. He knew that there was a humility and a faith in the breast of this Gentile officer—the first Gentile that ever applied to him—such as was not to be found in any Israelitish bosom. It was to bring these before the eyes of his fellow-countrymen, and to hold them up for admiration and rebuke, that he did not at the first act as he had done at Cana, but made that movement towards the Centurion's dwelling.

Wonderful, indeed, the faith embodied in the message which the Centurion sent: I, a Roman officer, have a limited authority, but within its limits this authority is supreme. I can say unto one of my soldiers, Go, and he goeth; to another, Come, and he cometh; to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. But thou, Jesus, art supreme over all. As my soldiers are under me, so under thee are all the powers and processes of nature. Thou canst say—to this disease, Come, and it cometh; to that other disease, Go, and it goeth; to thy servants Life and Death, Do this, and they do it. Say thou then but the word, and my

servant shall be healed. And Jesus marvelled when he heard the message, and he turned about and said to the people that followed him,—it was very much for their sakes that he had arranged it so, that so many peculiarities should attend this miracle, and such a pre-eminence be given to this first exhibition of Gentile faith in him,—I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. It was the highest exercise of human faith in him that Jesus had yet met with, and he wondered and rejoiced that it should be found beyond the bounds of Israel. Midway between the Gentile and the Jew stood the woman of Samaria ; outside the bounds of Judaism stood this Roman Centurion. Was it to prefigure the great future of the gathering in of all people, and nations, and tongues, and tribes, that so early in his ministry such manifestation of a faith in the Saviour was made?

But while wondering with Christ at the beautiful exhibition of humility and faith in a quarter so unlooked-for, let us take home the warning with which Jesus followed up the expression of his approval and admiration: “And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven ;

but the children of the kingdom shall be cast into outer darkness, there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." Surely from the lips of the living and compassionate Redeemer words of such terrible import never would have passed, had the warning they convey not been needed. Let it then be the first and most earnest effort of each of us to enter into this kingdom, of which nominally and by profession we are the children, in all humility, and with entire trust in Christ our Saviour, lest the opportunity for entering in go past, and the door be shut—shut by Him who shutteth, and no man openeth.

XVI.

THE POOL OF BETHESDA.*

COULD we ascertain what the feast was to which Jesus went up, and at which he healed the man beside the Pool of Bethesda, it would go far to settle the question as to the length of our Lord's public ministry ; but after all the labor that has been bestowed on the investigation, it remains still uncertain whether it was the Passover, or one of the other annual festivals. If it was the Passover—as, upon the whole, we incline to think it was, as John mentions three other Passovers, one occurring before, and two after this one—Christ's ministry would come to be regarded as covering a space of about three years and a half ; if it were one or other of the lesser festivals, a year or more, according to the festival which is fixed upon,

* John v.

must be deducted from that period. This much, at least, appears certain, that it was our Lord's second appearance in Jerusalem after his baptism, and that it occurred at or near the close of a year, the most of which had been spent in Judea. On the occasion of this second visit, Jesus went one Sabbath-day to walk through the cloisters or colonnades that were built round a large swimming bath, called the Pool of Bethesda. Tradition has for many ages pointed to a large excavation 360 feet long, 130 feet broad, and 75 feet deep, lying outside the north wall of the Harem enclosure, and near to St. Stephen's Gate, as having been this pool. The peculiar character of its masonry establishes the fact that it must have been intended originally as a reservoir for water. At one of its corners there are two arched openings or vaults, one twelve, the other nineteen feet wide, extending backward to an unknown distance, forming part, it may have been, of the porches of which the Evangelist speaks. These porches, on the day on which Jesus visited them, were crowded. They formed one of the city resorts ; and besides numbers of others that frequented them for the ordinary use of the waters, there lay around a great multitude

of the blind, the halt, the withered, waiting for the moving of the water.

If we accept the account given in the fourth verse of the fifth chapter, the moving of the water, and the healing virtue temporarily bestowed upon it during the period of its commotion, were due to angelic agency. The verse, however, is wanting in many of the most ancient manuscripts, and has come now to be very generally regarded as an interpolation very naturally inserted by the early transcribers of the Gospel, as embodying the expression of what was then the popular belief. We are disposed the rather to go in with this view, when we consider how unlike to angelic influence is the kind of agency here attributed to it as elsewhere described in Holy Writ, and how singular it would have been had the healing power been so bestowed that it should be restricted to the single person who first stepped in. Of itself this would not be sufficient ground on which to reject the idea of a supernatural agency having been employed, but if the verse alluded to did not form part of the original writing of the Evangelist, then we are left at liberty to believe that this was a pool supplied by an intermittent spring, which at certain

seasons, owing to the sudden formation of particular gases, bubbled up, throwing the whole water of the reservoir into commotion, impregnated for the time with qualities which had a healing power over some forms of disease—a power of course greatly magnified in the popular idea. But whether the verse, and the explanation which it contains of the moving of the water, be accepted or rejected, the narrative of what Jesus said and did remains untouched.

Wandering through these crowded porches, and looking at the strange array of the diseased waiting there for the auspicious moment, the eye of Jesus rests on one who wears a dejected and despairing look, as if he had given up all hope. Thirty-eight years before, the powers of life and motion had been so enfeebled that it was with the greatest difficulty, and at the slowest pace, he could creep along the ground. His friends had got tired perhaps of helping him otherwise, and as their last resource, had carried him to the porches of the pool, and left him there to do the best for himself he could. And he had done that best often and often, yet had failed. Every time the troubling of the water came, he had made the effort ; but every

time he had seen some one of more vigor and alertness, or better helped, get in before him and snatch the benefit out of his hands. Jesus knew all this : knew how long it had been since the paralytic stroke first fell on him ; how long it was since he had been brought to try the efficacy of these waters ; how the expectation of cure, at first full and bright, had been gradually fading from his heart. To rekindle the dying hope, to fix the man's attention on himself, Jesus bends over the bed on which he lies, looks down at him, and says, Wilt thou be made whole ? Were the words spoken in mockery ? That could not be ; a glance at the speaker was sufficient to disprove it. But the question surely would not have been asked had the speaker known how helpless was he to whom it was addressed. He said, " I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool, but while I am coming another steppeth down before me." As he gives this explanation, he looks up more earnestly into the stranger's face—a face he had never seen before—and gathers a new life and hope from the expression of sympathy, the look of power that countenance conveys.

"Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed,

and walk." The command was instantly obeyed. The cure was instantly complete. The short time, however, that it had taken for him to stoop and lift the mattress on which he lay, had been sufficient for Jesus to pass on, and be lost among the crowd. The stopping, the question, the command, the cure, all had been so sudden, the man has been so taken by surprise, that he doubts whether he would be able to recognize that stranger if he saw him again. Lifting his bed, and rejoicing in the new sensation of recovered strength, he walks through the city streets in search of his old home and friends. The Jews—an expression by which, in his Gospel, John always means, not the general community, but some of the ecclesiastical heads and rulers of the people—the Jews see him as he walks, and say to him: "It is the Sabbath-day; it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed." No answer could be more natural, as no excuse could be more valid, than that which the man gave when he said: "He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed and walk." His challengers do not ask him anything about the healing—as soon as they hear of it, they suspect who the healer was—but fixing upon the act in which the breach of the Sabbath lay,

and as if admitting the validity of the man's defence, in throwing the responsibility of that act upon him who had ordered him to do it, "They asked him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed and walk?" He could not tell, and so the conversation by the wayside dropped.

Soon after, the healed man is in the Temple, thanking God, let us believe, for the great mercy bestowed upon him. Jesus, too, is there ; but they might have passed without the healed recognizing the healer. It was not the purpose, however, of our Lord that it should be so. Finding the man among the worshippers, he says to him, "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." Nothing more seems to have been said ; nothing more to have passed between the two ; but that short sentence, what a light it threw upon the distant past !—reminding the man that it had been to the sins of his youth that he had owed the eight-and-thirty years of infirmity that had followed ; and what a solemn warning did they carry as to the future !—reminding him that if, on being restored to strength, he should return to sin, a still worse thing than so many years of bodily infirmity might be in store for him. Jesus gives this

warning, and passes on. Recognizing him at once as he who had cured him beside the pool, the man inquires about him of the bystanders, and learns now who he is. And he goes and tells the Jews ; not, let us hope, from any malicious motive, or any desire to put an instrument into the hands of Christ's enemies. Considering where and how he had so long been lying, he may have known so little of all that had recently happened, as to imagine that he was at once pleasing the rulers, and doing a service to Jesus, by informing them about his cure. But it was no new intelligence that he conveyed. The Jews, we presume, knew well enough who had effected this cure. But it was the first instance in which they had heard of Jesus healing on the Sabbath-day—of itself in their eyes a violation of its sanctity ; and as it would appear that, not content with this offence, he had added another in ordering the man to carry on that day a burden through the streets—a thing strictly and literally prohibited by the law—it may have gratified the Jews to be able to convict Jesus of a double breach of the Sabbath law by direct and indubitable evidence from the man's own lips. You can imagine the secret though malignant satis-

faction with which they got and grasped this weapon, one at once of defence and of assault ; how they would use it in vindicating their rejection of Christ as a teacher sent from God, for could God send a man who would be guilty of such flagrant breaches of his law ? how they would use it in carrying out those purposes of persecution already brooding in their breasts.

Their hostility to Jesus, which had been deepening ever since his daring act of cleansing the Temple, now reached its height. From this time forth—and it deserves to be especially noted as having occurred at so early a stage, inasmuch as it forms the key to much of our Lord's subsequent conduct—they sought to slay him, because he had done those things on the Sabbath-day. But though the purpose to slay him was formed, it was not expressed, nor attempted to be carried out. Things were not yet ripe for its execution. Jesus might be convicted as a Sabbath-breaker, and all the opprobrium of such a conviction be heaped upon his head ; but as things then stood, it would not be possible to have the penalty of death inflicted on him upon that ground. They must wait and watch for an opportunity of accusing

him of some crime which will carry that penalty even in the eyes of a Roman judge.

Though not serving them much in this respect, they have not to wait long till, in their very presence—so that they have no need to ask for other proof—Jesus commits a still higher offence than that of violating the Sabbath. Aware of the charges that they were bringing against him as to his conduct at the Pool of Bethesda, he seizes upon some public opportunity when he could openly address the rulers ; and in answer to the special accusation of having broken the Sabbath, he says to them, “ My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” The rest into which my Father entered after his work of creation, of which your earthly Sabbatic rest is but a type, was not one of absolute inactivity—of the suspension, cessation of his agency in and over the vast creation he had formed. He worketh on still ; worketh on continuously, without distinction of days, through the Sabbath-day as through all days, sustaining, preserving, renewing, vivifying, healing. Were this work Divine to cease, there would not be even that earthly Sabbath for you to rest in. And as he, my Father, worketh, so work I, his Son, knowing as little of

distinction of days in my working as he. By process of nature, as you call it—that is, by the hand of my Father—a man is often cured on the Sabbath-day. And it is only what He thus does that I have done, and my authority for doing so is this, that I am his Son.’

Whatever difficulty the men to whom this defence of his alleged Sabbath-breaking was offered, may have had either in understanding its nature or appreciating its force, one thing is clear, that they did at once and most clearly comprehend that in speaking of God as his Father in the way he did, Jesus was claiming to stand to God, not simply in the relationship of a child—such a relationship as that in which we all, as the creatures of his power and the preserved of his providence, may be regarded as standing—but in that of a close, personal, peculiar sonship belonging to him alone, involving in it, as all true filiation does, unity of nature between the Father and the Son. It was thus that the Jews understood Jesus to speak of the Father and of himself, when he so associated himself with the Father, as to imply that if his Father was not a breaker of the Sabbath in healing men upon that day, neither was he, his Son ; and so they sought the more to kill

him, because he had not only broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his own Father, making himself equal with God.

If the Jews had misunderstood Jesus, what was easier than for him to have said so ; to have denied and repudiated the allegation that he had intended to claim anything like equality with God ? Instead of this, what does Jesus do ? He goes on to reassert, to explain, and to expand what had been implied in the compendious expression he had employed. Anything like such distinction between the Father and the Son as that the one would or could judge, or will, or act independently of the other—without or against the other—he emphatically and reiteratedly repudiates : “ Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself ; ” “ I can of my own self do nothing.” The very nature of the relationship forbade it that the Son ever would or could assert for himself any such independence of the Father as the creature, in its willfulness and sinfulness, is apt to assert for itself. But though all such separation and independence of council and of action is here precluded, so complete is the concert that what things soever the Father doeth the same doeth the Son likewise. Some

things that the great Divine Master Workman does, a superior scholar may copy or imitate. But Jesus does not say, what things the Father does, the Son does other things somewhat like them ; but the same things, and whatever things the Father doeth, the same doeth the Son, and doeth them likewise, *i. e.*, in the very same manner, by the exercise of the same power, for the furtherance of the same ends.

In far greater works than that simply of healing, will the unity of action between them be made to appear. One of these greater works is that of quickening the dead, by the incommunicable prerogative of the Creator. This prerogative the Father and the Son have equally. As he wills, and by his will, the Father quickeneth ; so too does the Son. The highest form of life is that which is breathed into souls spiritually dead. This life is of the Son's imparting equally as of the Father. It comes through the hearing of Christ's word ; through a believing in the Father as he who sent the Son. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead—the spiritually dead—shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live. Another work peculiar to Divinity is that of judging ; approv-

ing, condemning, assigning to every man at last, in strict accordance with what he is, and has been, and has done, his place and destiny. Who but the all-wise, all-just, all-gracious God is competent for such a task ? but that task, in the outward execution of it, the Father has devolved upon the Son, giving him authority to execute it, because he is not simply the Son of God, in which character he needs not such authority to be conveyed to him ; but because he is also the Son of man, and it is in that complex or mediatorial office with which he is invested, that he is to sit upon the Throne of Judgment at the last, when all the inhabitants of the earth shall stand before his tribunal. Should this then be a subject for marvel ? for the hour was coming, though not yet come, when all that are in their graves shall hear Christ's voice and shall come forth ; they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation. Having thus unfolded the great truth of the unity of will, purpose, and action, between the Father and the Son, Jesus ceases to speak of himself in the third person, and proceeds onward to the close of his address, to speak in the first person, and that in the plain-

est way,* of the testimonies that had been borne to him, that of the Father, that of John, that of his own works, that of the Holy Scriptures, all of which these Jews had willfully rejected. Now the accused becomes the accuser. Now he who had been charged as a Sabbath-breaker, rises to the height of that very eleva-

* "I can of mine own self do nothing : as I hear, I judge : and my judgment is just ; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. There is another that beareth witness of me ; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true. Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth. But I receive not testimony from man : but these things I say, that ye might be saved. He was a burning and a shining light ; and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light. But I have greater witness than that of John : for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me. And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. And ye have not his word abiding in you : for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not. Search the scriptures ; for in them ye think ye have eternal life : and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. I receive not honor from men. But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you. I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not : if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only ? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father : there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me : for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words ?"

tion which they had regarded him as a profane and blasphemous man for venturing to claim ; and he tells these unbelieving Jews, as one knowing the hearts of all men, and entitled to judge, and exercising that very authority with which, as the Son of man, he had been clothed—he tells them, that they had not the love of God in them, nor his word abiding in them ; that they did not believe Moses when he wrote of him ; that, much as they revered their Scriptures, they only believed in them so far as they tallied with their own thoughts and fancies. Still further, he declares that there was this great obstacle in the way of their receiving one who came to them as Jesus did, in the name of the Father, to do alone the Father's will, that they were all too busy seeking after the honor that came from man, minding earthly things, and seeking not the honor that came from the one only living and true God ; attributing thus all their perverseness to moral causes, to motives operating within, over which they should have had control ; this being their condemnation, that they would not come to him that they might have life. He would, but they would not.

If Jesus Christ were but a man, what are we

to make of such a discourse as this? What are we to make of the first part of it, in which he speaks of the Father and his connexion with him? What of the second part of it, in which he speaks to the Jews and of their treatment of him? We know not which would be the worst,—the arrogance in the one direction, or the presumption and uncharitableness in the other,—if this were but a man speaking of the Creator, and to his fellows. It can alone relieve him from the guilt of profane assumption towards God, and unlicensed liberty with man, to believe that Jesus was really that which the Jews regarded him as claiming to be, the Son of, the equal with, the Father, whom all men should honor even as they honor God.

But let me ask now your particular attention to the circumstances under which this marvellous discourse was spoken, and to the object which, in the first instance, as at first delivered, it was intended to serve. Jesus voluntarily, intentionally, created the occasion for its delivery. The miracle here—the healing of the impotent man at the Pool of Bethesda—was a wholly secondary or subordinate matter, intended to bring Christ into that relationship with the Jewish rulers, which called for and

gave its fitness and point to this address. Why did Jesus choose a Sabbath day to walk in the porches of Bethesda? Why did he do what only on one or two occasions afterwards, he did, instead of waiting to be applied to, himself single out the man and volunteer to heal him? Why did he not simply cure the man, but bid him also take up his bed and walk? He might have chosen another day, and then, in the story of the cure, we should have had but another instance added to the many of the exertion of our Lord's divine and beneficent power. He might have simply told the man to rise up and walk, and none could have told how the cure had been effected, or turned it into any charge. He chose that day, and he selected that man, and he laid on him the command he did, for the very purpose of bringing himself front to front with the Jewish rulers. At first the question between them seems to refer only to the right keeping of the Sabbath. Had Jesus as a man, as a Jew, broken the Sabbath law in curing a man upon that day? Had he broken it in telling the man he healed to carry his bed through the city? Had the Jews not misunderstood, overstrained the law, sticking to its letter, and violating its spirit? These were

grave questions, with which, as we shall find, Jesus afterwards did deal, when on another Sabbath he volunteered another cure. But here Christ waives all lesser topics—that, among the rest, of the right interpretation of the Sabbath law—and uses the antecedent circumstances as the basis on which to assert, and then amplify and defend, the truth of his true and only son-ship to the Father. His ministry in Judea was now about to close. Aware of the design against his life which had now been formed, and wishing to baffle it for a season, he retires to Galilee. But he will not leave Jerusalem till he has given one full and public testimony as to who and what he is, so that the Jews, in continuing to reject him, shall not have it in their power to say that he has not revealed his own character, nor expressed to them the real grounds upon which their opposition to him is based.

Such was the special drift and bearing of the address of Jesus as originally delivered to the Jews. But is there nothing in its close applicable to ourselves and to all men in every age? The same kind of obstacles that raised such a barrier in the way of the Jews believing in Jesus, do they not still exist? If the spirit of

pride and worldliness, a conventional piety and an extreme thirst for the applause and honor that cometh from man, occupy and engross our hearts, shall they not indispose and render us unable to believe simply, heartily, devotedly, on Jesus Christ? Of one thing let us be assured, that whatever be our disposition and conduct towards him, his towards us is ever a longing desire to have us, keep us, bless us, save us; and that the one and only thing that stands in the way of our enjoying all the benefits of his salvation, is our own unwillingness; his lament over all that wander away from him, being ever this, Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life

XVII.

THE SYNAGOGUE OF NAZARETH.*

IN the route commonly taken from Jerusalem to the Sea of Galilee, one of the most interesting day's travel is that which carries you from Jenin across the three valleys into which, at its upper extremity, the great plain of Esdraelon divides, and up to Nazareth, as it lies embedded in the southern ridge of the hills of Galilee. Crossing the first valley, we skirted the base of the mountains of Gilboa, and paused for a few moments upon a gentle elevation, now occupied by a few houses of the humblest description, on which Jezreel, the ancient capital of Israel, once stood, with the palace of Ahab in its centre, and the vineyard of Naboth in its outskirts. Our eye wandered along the twelve or fourteen miles of dead-level that run from Jezreel to Carmel, and the

* Luke iv. 16-31.

figure of the great prophet running before the king's chariot rose before us. We turned round and gazed upon the slopes of Gilboa, and the tide of Saul's last battle seemed to roll over them, and the sounds of the funeral dirge of David to be lingering still among the hills. The crossing of the next valley carried us to the base of Little Hermon, where a small hamlet lies, consisting of a few miserable-looking hovels, surrounded by ill-kept gardens. This was the Shunem in which the house once stood which had in it the prophet's chamber; and these were the gardens in one of which the widow's son once sickened unto death. Leaving behind us the place which, in the old prophetic times, saw the dead child given back to his mother, climbing Little Hermon and descending on the other side, we entered another village which witnessed another dead son given back to another widowed mother, by him who touched the bier and said, "Young man, I say unto thee arise." Here, in his village of Nain, we came for the first time on the traces of our Lord's Galilean ministry. The third plain passed, a steep ascent carried us to the summit of that range of hills which forms the north-eastern boundary of the plain of Esdraelon.

Descending, we came upon a circular, basin-shaped depression, girdled all round by a dozen or more swelling hill-tops that rise from three to four hundred feet above the valley they enclose. Near to the foot of the highest of these surrounding hills, nestled in a secluded upland hollow, lies the village of Nazareth. No village in Palestine is liker what it was in the days of Jesus Christ, and none more fitting to have been his residence during the greater part of his life on earth. The seclusion is perfect, greater even than that of Bethany, which on one side looks out openly upon the country that stretches away to the shore of the Dead Sea. Nazareth is closed in on every side, offering to us an emblem of the seclusion of those thirty years which were passed there so quietly. Pure hill breezes play over the village, and temper the summer heat. The soil around is rich, and yields the fairest flowers and richest fruits of Palestine. You seem shut out from the world, and yet you have but to climb a few hundred feet to the top of the overlooking hill, and one of the widest, finest prospects in all the Holy Land bursts upon your view. Away in the west, a sparkling light plays upon the waters of the Mediterranean, revealing a portion

of the Great Sea that formed the highway to the isles of the Gentiles. The ridge of Carmel runs out into the waters, closing in the bold promontory on the top of which Elijah stood and discomfited the prophets of Baal. Southward, below your feet, stretches the great battle-plain of Palestine, behind which rises the hilly district of Samaria, through the opening between which and the mountains of Gilboa the eye wanders away eastward across the whole breadth of the Holy Land, till it rests upon that range, the everlasting eastern background of every Syrian prospect—the mountain range of Bashan and Gilead and Moab. Turning northward, the whole hill-country of Galilee lies spread out before us, the Sea of Gennesaret hidden, but a glimpse of Safed obtained, the city set upon a hill, above and beyond which there rise the snowy heights of Hermon, called by the Arabs the Sheikh of the Mountains.

Up to the hill-top which commands this magnificent prospect, how often in childhood, youth and early manhood must Jesus have ascended, to gaze—who shall tell us with what thoughts?—upon the chosen scene of his earthly ministry, and upon that sea over whose waters the glad

tidings of salvation were to be borne to so many lands. It pleases us to think that so many years of our Lord's life were spent in such a home as that which Nazareth supplied ; one so retired, so rich in natural beauty, with glimpses of the wide world around for the morning or evening hours. There it was, in the fields below the village, that he had watched how the lilies grew, and seen with what a gorgeous dress, in coloring above that of kingly purple, their Creator clothed them. There, in the gardens, he had noticed how the smallest of all seeds grew into the tallest herbs. There, outside the house, he had seen two women grinding at one mill ; inside, a woman hiding the leaven in the dough. There, in the market-place, he had seen the five sparrows sold for the two farthings. The sheep-walks of the hills and the vineyards of the valleys had taught him what were the offices of the good shepherd and the careful vine-dresser ; and all the observations of those thirty years were treasured up to be drawn upon in due time, and turned into the lessons by which the world was to be taught wisdom.

No means are left for ascertaining what impression was made during these thirty years

upon the inmates of his home, the playmates of his boyhood, the associates of his youth, the villagers generally in the midst of whom he grew up. It may readily be believed that the gentleness, the truthfulness, the lovingness displayed by him, must have won respect. Yet we can imagine, too, that the unearthly purity and sanctity of such a childhood and such a manhood may have created an awe, a sense of distance and separation, which in meaner spirits might deepen into something like aversion and dislike. At last he leaves them, and is not seen in Nazareth for many months. But the strangest tidings about him are afloat through the village. First, they hear of what happened at his baptism in the Jordan, then of what he did a few miles off at Cana, then of his miracles in Jerusalem, then of his curing the nobleman's son of Capernaum ; and now he is once more among them, and the whole village is moved. The Sabbath-day comes round. He had been in the habit all through these thirty years of attending in the synagogue ; sitting there quietly and unobtrusively, taking part in the prayers and praises, listening to the reading of the Law and of the Prophets, and to the explanations of the passages which were

read, with what kind and amount of self-application none of all around him knew. But how will he comport himself in the new character that he has assumed? The synagogue is crowded with men among whom he has been brought up, all curious to see and hear. The earlier part of the service goes on as usual. The opening prayer is recited; the opening psalm is chanted; the portion from the Law, from the Book of Moses, is read by the ordinary minister; the time has come for the second reading—that of some portion of the Prophets—when Jesus steps forth and stands in the reader's place. There is no challenging of his right to do so. It is not a right belonging exclusively to priest or Levite; any Jew of any tribe might exercise it. But there was a functionary in every synagogue regularly appointed to the office. This functionary, in this instance, at once gives way, and hands to Jesus the roll of the prophet out of which, according to the calendar, the reading for the day is to be taken. It is the roll of the prophet Isaiah. Jesus opens it, and whether it was that the opening verses of the 61st chapter were those actually appointed for that day's service, or whether it was that the roll opened at random,

and these verses were the first that presented themselves, or that Jesus, from the whole book, purposely selected the passage, he read as follows : " The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor ; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that were bruised ; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." And stopping there, in the middle of the sentence, he closed the book, gave it to the minister, and sat down upon the raised seat of the reader, taking the attitude usually assumed by Jewish teachers. There was a breathless stillness. The eyes of all that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. " This day," said Jesus, " is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

It was a scripture universally understood to be descriptive of the coming Messiah, his office, and his work. Jesus gives no reason for appropriating and applying it to himself ; he offers nothing in the shape of argument or evidence in favor of his being indeed the Christ, the anointed of the Holy Ghost. He contents himself with the simple authoritative assertion

of the fact. We have indeed but the first sentence given that he spoke on this occasion. What followed, however, we may well believe to have been an exposition of the passage read, as containing an account of the true character, ends, and objects of his mission as the Christ of God; the telling who the poor were to whom he brought good tidings, who the bruised and the broken-hearted were whom he came to heal, who the bound were that he came to liberate, who the blind whose eyes he came to open, what that year was he came to usher in—the long year of grace which still runs on, in the course of which there is acceptance for all of us with God, through Christ. As Jesus spake of these things—spake with such ease, such grace, such dignity—the first impression made upon the Nazarenes, his old familiar friends, was that of astonishment and admiration. He had got no other, no better education than that which the poorest of them had received. He had attended none of the higher schools in any of the larger towns, had set at the feet of none of their chief rabbis to be instructed in the law; yet no rabbi of the schools could speak with greater fluency, greater authority, greater confidence. Soon, however,

as from the mere manner, they began to turn their thoughts to the substance of this discourse, and began to realize what the position really was which Jesus was assuming,—that it was nothing short of the very highest that ever any son of man was to reach ; that it was as the Lord's anointed Christ that he was speaking, and speaking to them as the poor, the blind, the captives, to whom he was to render such services—the admiration turns into envy. Who is he that is arrogating to himself all this dignity, authority, and power? who is speaking to them as so immeasurably his inferiors, as needing so much his help? Is not this the son of honest, plain old Joseph, whom we all so well remember as our village carpenter? His brethren and his sisters, are they not here beside us in the synagogue, listening, apparently with no great delight or approval, to this new strain in which their brother has begun to speak? He the Messiah, the opener of our eyes, the healer of our hearts, our deliverer from bondage! Before he asks us to believe any such thing of him, let him show us some sign from heaven; do some of those miracles that they say he has done elsewhere, particularly at Capernaum. If he wanted us, who

have all known him so well from his childhood, to believe in him as a prophet, he should have come to us first, convinced us first, unfolded his credentials to us first, wrought his first miracles here in Nazareth. Jealousy heightens the offence that envy had created, and ere long the whole company in that synagogue is looking at him askance. Jesus sees this, and turning from his former subject of discourse, tells them that he sees and knows it, lays open their hearts to them, puts the very words into their lips that they were ready to utter, and proceeds to vindicate himself for not showing any special sign to his fellow-townsmen, by quoting two instances in which Elijah and Elisha, the two great workers of miracles among the prophets, passed over all their fellow-countrymen to show favor to the Sidonian widow and the Syrian officer. There is nothing that men dislike more than that the evil and the bitter things hidden in their breasts should be brought to light. It aggravates this dislike when the discoverer, and revealer of their thoughts, is the very person against whom the malignant sentiment is cherished. Should he remain calm and unimpassioned, neither taken by surprise, nor betraying irritation, they are so much

the more incensed. So felt the Nazarenes under the address of our Lord ; and when he proceeded to assume the mantle of Elijah and Elisha, as if he were of the same order with these great prophets of the olden time, it is more than they can any longer bear. They will be lectured no more in such a way by the son of the carpenter. They rise, they rush upon him, they thrust him out of the village, and on to the brow of a precipice over which they would have hurled him ; but it pleased him to put forth that power, and to lay upon them that spell which he laid upon the high-priest's band in the garden of Gethsemane. They are hurrying him to the brow of the hill ; he turns, he looks, the spell is on them, their hands drop powerless by their sides ; he passes through the midst of them, they offer no resistance, and before they recover themselves he is gone.

About two miles from Nazareth, there is a hill which shows, upon the side facing the plain of Esdraelon, a long and steep descent. The monks of the middle ages—the determiners of most of the sites of the holy places in Palestine—fixed on this as the precipice over which the angry Nazarenes designed to throw our

Saviour, and gave it the name of the Mount of Precipitation. The very distance of this mount from the village, goes far to disprove the tradition regarding it. But though this distance had been less, it could not have been the place, for it is distinctly stated by the Evangelist that it was a brow of the hill on which the city was built from which they intended to cast him. Modern travellers are all agreed that it must have been from some part of the rocky cliff which overhangs the oldest quarter of the present village of Nazareth that Jesus was about to have been thrown. This rocky cliff extends for some distance along the hill on which Nazareth is built, and shows at different points perpendicular descents of from thirty to forty feet, which, as they have been filled up below with accumulations of rubbish, must originally have been much deeper. Any one of these would so far answer to the description given by the Evangelist. In taking this view, however, it is necessary to suppose that on leaving the synagogue, with the deliberate intention of killing him, the infuriated Nazarenes either forced Jesus up the height from which they designed afterwards to cast him, or made a circuit up and round the hill, in order to reach the in

tended spot. The same ascent which it must have been needful thus to make, I made, in company with the Rev. Mr. Zeller, who for some years has been resident as a missionary in Nazareth. On getting to the top of the ridge, we found ourselves on a nearly level plateau of considerable extent. There were no houses on this plateau, but Mr. Zeller pointed out to us, here and there, those underground cisterns which are the almost infallible signs of houses having once been in the neighborhood. Here, then, on this plateau, a portion, if not the whole, of the ancient Nazareth may have stood. If it was so, if even a few houses of the old village were here, then, as we know it to have been the rule that, wherever it was possible, the synagogue was built on the highest ground in or near the city or village to which it belonged, it must have been on this elevated ground that the synagogue of Nazareth stood, not far from the brow of the hill. It seems more likely that the Nazarenes should, in the phrenzy of the moment, have attempted to throw our Lord from a precipice quite at hand, than that, acting on a deliberate purpose, they should have spent some time, and climbed a hill in order to its execution.

But turning now from the locality and outward circumstances of this event in our Saviour's life, let us try to enter into its meaning and spirit. So far as we know, this was the first occasion on which Jesus addressed an audience of his countrymen in the synagogue on the Sabbath-day ; it would appear indeed to have been the only one on which he took the duty of the reader as well as that of the exhorter. It was a common enough thing for any one, even a stranger, to be asked, when the proper service of the synagogue was over, to address some words of instruction or encouragement to the audience. The Gospels tell us how frequently Jesus made use of this opportunity ; and you may remember how at Antioch in Pisidia, after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent unto Paul and Barnabas, saying, " Men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on." The peculiarity of the incident now before us lay in this, that Jesus first read the passage from the Prophets, and then grounded directly upon it the address which he delivered. In this respect we might regard it as the first sermon ever preached ; the text chosen, and the discourse uttered by our

Lord himself. Had these Nazarenes, who, in their insatiate and zealous craving after signs and wonders, wanted him only to do the same or greater things than he had done in Capernaum, but known how highly honored, far above that of its being made a mere theatre for the exhibition of divine power, their synagogue was, in being the first place on earth in which that instrument was employed which has been so mighty through God to the pulling down of the strongholds of the ungodly, and the upbuilding of the Church, their vanity might have been gratified; but they slighted the privilege thus enjoyed, and so lost the benefit.

The body of the first synagogue sermon of our Saviour has been lost. The text and introductory sentence alone remain, but how much do they reveal to us of the nature, the needfulness, the preciousness of those spiritual offices which our Divine Redeemer came on earth to execute, and which he still stands waiting to discharge towards our sinful humanity! It was to a company of a few hundreds at the most that the words of Jesus were spoken in the synagogue at Nazareth; but that desk from which they were spoken,

was turned into the centre of a circle whose bounds are the ends of the earth, and that audience has multiplied to take in the whole family of mankind. To the men of every land in every age, Jesus has been thus proclaiming what the great ends are of his mission to this earth. To open blinded eyes, to heal bruised and bleeding and broken hearts, to unlock the doors, and unloose the fetters of the imprisoned and the bound ; to announce to the poor, the meek, the humble, that theirs is the kingdom of heaven ; and to proclaim to all that this is the year of our Lord, the long year of Christ that takes in all the centuries down to his Second Coming, the year in every day and every hour and every moment of which our heavenly Father waits to forgive, receive, accept, all contrite ones who come to him. Such, our Saviour tells us, is that great work of grace and power for whose accomplishment he has been anointed of the Father and replenished by the Spirit. In that high office to which he has thus been set apart, and for which he has been thus qualified, we all need his services. There is a spiritual blindness which Jesus only can remove ; a spiritual imprisonment from which he only can release ; a deadly spiritual

malady eating in upon our heart which he alone can heal. And shall he not do all this for us, if we feel our need of its being done, since the doing of it is the very design of his most gracious ministry among the sinful children of men? Let us not do him the injustice to believe that he will be indifferent to the accomplishment of the very errand of mercy on which he came, or that he will refuse in ours or in any case to enlighten and emancipate, bind up and heal.

It seems to us to throw a distinct, and, though not a very broad, yet a very clear and beautiful beam of light on the graciousness of our Lord's character, that instead of reading the number of verses ordinarily recited, he stopped where he did in his quotation from Isaiah. Had he gone on, he should have said, "to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God." Why not go on, why pause thus in the middle of the sentence? not assuredly that he meant either to deny or hide the truth, that the day of vengeance would follow upon the acceptable year, if the opportunities of that year were abused and lost; but that then and now, it is his chosen and most grateful office to throw wide open the

arms of the heavenly mercy, and invite all to throw themselves into them and be saved.

But though he came in the Spirit to those among whom he had been brought up, though he came thus to his own, by his own he was not received, by his own he was despised and rejected. His treatment at Nazareth was a foreshadowing of the treatment given generally to him by his countrymen, and terminating in his crucifixion on Calvary. The rude handling in the Galilean village, the binding, the scourging, the crucifying in the Jewish capital, were types of that still rougher spiritual handling, that crucifying of our Lord afresh which the world, in every age, has gone on repeating. It was their very familiarity with him in the intercourse of daily life which proved such a snare to the Nazarenes, and tempted them into their great offence. Let us fear lest our familiarity with him of another kind—the frequency with which we hear about him, and read about him, and have him in one way or other set before us—blind our eyes and blunt our heart to the wonders of his redeeming love, and exceeding riches of his grace and power.

16 XVIII.

FIRST SABBATH IN CAPERNAUM, AND FIRST CIR-
CUIT OF GALILEE.*

THE first eight months of our Lord's ministry were spent, as we have seen, in Judea. By the sign from heaven, by the Baptist's proclamation, by Christ's own words and deeds, he was presented to the rulers and to the people as the Son of God, the Messiah. His character was misunderstood; his claims were rejected. At Jerusalem a plot against his life was formed; it was no longer safe for him to reside where the Jewish authorities had power. Jesus retired to Galilee (John iv. 1-3). Besides the purpose of placing himself beyond the reach of the Scribes and Pharisees of Jerusalem, another circumstance seems to have had its influence in directing Christ's footsteps

* Matt. iv. 12-22, 23-25; Mark i. 21-39; Luke iv. 42-44.

into Galilee. He heard that John was cast into prison. The Baptist's work was over ; the labors of the Forerunner were closed ; the ground was open for Jesus to occupy. Hitherto, in his earlier Judean ministry, he had neither publicly taught in the synagogues, nor openly and indiscriminately healed the sick, nor called any other disciples to his side than those who voluntarily and temporarily followed him.* We may safely say, then, that prior to his appearance in Galilee, he had taken no steps either to proclaim the advent of the kingdom, or, by the selection of a band of chosen adherents, to lay the foundation of that new economy which was to take the place of the one which was now waxing old, and was ready to vanish away. It looks as if, before fully and

* His disciples, indeed, in imitation of John's practice, had begun to baptize, but as soon as "the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus had made and baptized more disciples than John (though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples), he left Judea, and departed again into Galilee" (John iv. 1-3). It would seem to have been a sudden impulse of zeal in their Master's cause which led those first disciples to engage so eagerly in baptizing,—a zeal which, instead of checking or rebuking, Jesus dealt with by quietly cutting off the occasion for its display. By his own removal to Galilee, an entirely new state of things was ushered in, and by John's imprisonment his baptisms ceased ; nor do we read anywhere of a Galilean baptism by the disciples of Jesus.

openly entering on the task of providing a substitute for that Judaic economy which his own kingdom was to overturn, Jesus had gone up to Jerusalem, and given to the head and representatives of the Jewish commonwealth the choice of receiving or rejecting him as their Messiah. It was not, at least, till after he had been so rejected in Judea, that he began in Galilee to preach the gospel of the kingdom (Matt. i. 15), and to plant the first seeds of that tree whose leaves were to be for the healing of the nations. This helps to explain at once the marked difference between Christ's course of conduct during the period which immediately succeeded his baptism, which was passed in Judea, and the laborious months in Galilee which followed, and the marked silence regarding the former which is preserved by the first three Evangelists, who all make our Lord's ministry begin in Galilee, and contain no allusion to anything as happening between the temptation in the wilderness and the opening of his ministry there. Nor do they allude to any visits of Jesus to Jerusalem prior to those which he made after his final departure from Galilee, and which preceded his crucifixion. With them, up to that time, Galilee appears

as the exclusive theatre of our Lord's labors. It is to the supplemental Gospel of St. John that we are indebted for all our knowledge of the memorable incidents in Judea, which preceded the first preaching in the synagogue of Nazareth. We can understand this singular silence of the first three Evangelists, if we regard our Lord's earlier appearance and residence in Judea as constituting rather a preliminary dealing with the Jews, in the way of testing their disposition and capacity to welcome him as their own last and greatest prophet, than as forming an integral part of that work whereby the foundations of the Christian church were laid.

Rejected by the chiefs of the people in the capital, Jesus comes to Galilee. There, in the synagogue of that town in which he had lived so many years, he first publicly proclaims his office and his work, as the healer of the broken hearted, the restorer of sight to the blind, the deliverer of the captives, the preacher of the gospel to the poor—an office and a work which had nothing of confinement in it, nothing restricting it to any one age or country. But there, too, by his fellow-townsmen at Nazareth, as by the rulers of the capital, he is rejected,

and so he descends to the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Walking by these shores, he sees first Andrew and Peter casting a net into the sea. He says to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. Straightway they leave all and follow him." A little farther on, another pair of brothers, James and John, are in their boat mending their nets. He calls them in the same way, and they leave their boat and their nets, their father and the hired servants, and follow. He was not speaking to strangers, to those previously ignorant or indisposed to follow him. Andrew was one of the two disciples of John who had heard the Baptist say, "Behold the Lamb of God," and who had followed Jesus. The other of these two disciples was John. Andrew had brought his brother Peter to Jesus; and though it is not said that John had done the same with his brother James, the latter must already have been acquainted with Christ. Andrew, Peter, and John had followed Jesus from Bethabara to Cana, and had witnessed there the first of his miracles. They had been up at Jerusalem and seen the miracles which Jesus wrought at the first Passover which he attended. They may have taken part in the baptizing, may

have been with Jesus at the well of Jacob. Mention is made of disciples of Jesus being there with him, and who so likely to be among them as those who first followed him from Bethabara? But they do not appear as yet to have attached themselves permanently to his person, nor to have attended him on his return from his second visit to the metropolis, nor to have been with him at Nazareth. The stopping of the baptisms, the imprisonment of John, the scattering of his disciples, may have thrown them into some doubt as to the intentions of the new Teacher. For a time at least they had returned to their old occupation as fishermen, and were busily employed at it when Jesus met them; but his voice fell upon ears that welcomed its sound, his command upon spirits that were ready to obey. Not that they understood as yet that the summons was one to relinquish finally their earthly calling. The present was but a preliminary invitation to follow Jesus,—and chiefly by hearing what he said, and watching what he did, to be instructed by him in the higher art of catching men. It was not till weeks afterwards that they were solemnly set apart as his apostles.

In the meantime, however, they accompa-

nied him into Capernaum. The entrance of Jesus, attended by the two well-known brothers,—who, from the mention of hired servants belonging to one of them, we may believe, ranked high among their craft,—was soon known throughout all the town. The inhabitants of Capernaum had already heard enough about him to excite their liveliest curiosity. That curiosity had the keenest edge put on it by the manner in which the cure of the nobleman's child had been effected. And now he is amongst them. It would be a crowded synagogue on the Sabbath-day, when he stood up there to preach for the first time the gospel of the kingdom of God. Nothing of what he said upon this occasion has been preserved. The impression and effect upon his auditors are alone recorded: "They were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes;" "his word was with power" (Mark i. 22; Luke iv. 32). The scribes, the ordinary instructors of the people, presented themselves simply as expositors of the law, written and traditional, claiming no separate or independent authority, content with simply discharging the office of commentators, and resting their individual claims to

respect on the manner in which that office was fulfilled. But here is a teacher of quite a new order, who busies himself with none of those difficult or disputed questions about which the rabbis differed; who speaks to the people about a new kingdom—the kingdom of God—to be set up among them, and that in a tone of earnestness, certainty, authority, to which they were unaccustomed. What can this new kingdom be, and what position in it can this Jesus of Nazareth occupy?

Of one thing they are speedily apprised, that it is a kingdom opposed to that of Satan, intended to destroy it. For among them was a man possessed with a devil, who as Jesus stood speaking to them, broke in upon his discourse, and, with a voice so loud as to startle the whole synagogue, cried out, addressing himself to Jesus, “Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth; art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.” He speaks in the name of others, as representing the whole company of evil spirits, to whom, at that time, here and there, it had been allowed to usurp the seat of will and power in human breasts, and so to possess the men in whom they dwelt as to strip

them of their volition and conscious identity, and to turn them into human demons. But how came this human demon into the synagogue, and what prompted him to utter such cries of horror and of spite? Was this devil as much beside himself as the poor man in whom he dwelt? Had the presence, the look, the words of Jesus such a power over him that as the man could not regulate or restrain his own actions, so neither could the devil regulate or restrain his thoughts and words? His exclamations sound to our ear like the mad, involuntary, impotent outcries of the vassals of a kingdom who feel that the reins of empire are passing out of their hands, but who cannot give them up without telling who the greater than they is who has come to dispossess them of their power.

Whatever may be thought of the kind of pressure under which the devil who possessed this man acted; whether the testimony he gave to our Lord's character be regarded as free and spontaneous, intended rather to injure than to honor; or whether it be regarded as unwillingly drawn forth by close personal contact with the Holy One, the testimony so given was not welcomed by Christ. It came unsuitably from a quarter whence no witness should be borne to

him, nor was wished for, as it came unseasonably, when premature relations of his true character were not desired. In other instances as well as this Jesus did not suffer the devils to speak, "because they knew him," acting as to them on the same principle on which he often cautioned those whom he healed and his own disciples, not to make him known, seeking by such repression to prevent any hurrying forward before its time of what he knew would be the closing catastrophe of his career. But though refused thus, and as it were rejected by our Lord, its first wild impatient utterances all that it was permitted to give forth, this voice is most striking to us now as a testimony from the demon-world, through which a knowledge of who Jesus truly was seems so rapidly to have circulated. The Prince of Darkness, in his temptation of our Lord a year before, seems himself to have been in some doubt, as he put the question so often, "If thou be the Son of God." But no doubt was entertained by the devils who came, as Luke tells us, "out of many, crying out and saying, Thou art Christ, the Son of God" (Luke iv. 41.) Some have thought that those demoniacs whom Christ cured were lunatics, and nothing more;

men whose deranged and disordered intellects were soothed down into calmness and order by the gentle yet firm voice and look and power of Christ. But what are we to make of the unique testimony that so many of them gave to Christ's Messiahship and Sonship to God, and that at the very commencement of his ministry? Were lunatics the only ones who knew him? or whence got they such knowledge and such faith?

Accepting, with whatever mystery the whole subject of demoniac possessions is clothed, the simple account of the Evangelists, it does appear most wonderful,—the quick intelligence, the wild alarm, the terror-striking faith that then pervaded the demon-world, as if all the spirits of hell who had been suffered to make human bodies their habitation, grew pale at the very presence of Jesus, and could not but cry out in the extremity of their despair.

“Hold thy peace,” said Jesus to the devil in the synagogue, “and come out of him.” The man was seen to fall, torn as by violent convulsions; a loud, inarticulate, fiendish cry was heard to issue from his lips;* hale and unhurt, the devil gone, the man himself again, he rose

* Mark i. 36; Luke iv. 35.

to converse with those around, and to return to his home and friends. Amazement beyond description seized at once on all who saw or heard of what had happened. Men said to one another, in the synagogue, on the streets, by the highways, What thing is this, what a word is this ! for with authority he commandeth even the unclean spirits and they do obey him. And immediately (it could scarce well have been otherwise), the fame of him went out into every place of the country, and spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee.”* Chiefly, however, in Capernaum did the excitement prevail, begun by the cure of the demoniac in the synagogue, quickened by another cure that followed within an hour or two. The service of the synagogue closed before the mid-day meal. At its close Jesus accepted an invitation to go to the house of Simon and Andrew. These brothers, as we know, were natives of Bethsaida, and had hitherto resided there. But recently they had removed to Capernaum. Peter having married, and perhaps taken up his abode in the house of his mother-in-law, James and John were also of the invited guests. Jesus did not

* Mark i. 27, 28 ; Luke iv. 36, 37.

know that the house he went to was one of sickness, and his ignorance in this respect creates the belief that it was the first time he had entered it. But soon he hears that the great fever (it is the physician Luke who in this way describes it) has seized upon Simon's wife's mother. They tell him of it ; he goes to, bends kindly over her, takes her by the hand, rebukes the fever. The cure is instantaneous and complete. She rises, as if no disease had ever weakened her, with glad and grateful spirit to wait upon Jesus and the rest. And so within that home, kindly hands were provided, like those of Martha at Bethany, to minister to the Saviour's wants during the busiest, most toilsome period of his life, when, in season and out of season, early in the morning, and far on often in the night, he came and went, living longer under that roof of Peter's house at Capernaum, than under any other that sheltered him after his public ministry had begun. This cure, too, was noised abroad through the city. Here was an opportunity not to be lost, for who could tell but that next morning Jesus will be gone? Though it was the Sabbath, Jesus had not scrupled to eject the devil and rebuke the fever ; but the people could not so

easily get over their scruples. They wait till the sun has set before they apply to this new and strange physician. But meanwhile all that were diseased in Capernaum, and all that were possessed were brought. All the city has gathered together at the door of Peter's house. The sun goes down, and Jesus steps out into that bustling, anxious crowd; he lays his hand on every one of the diseased,* and heals them, and casts out all the spirits with his word. The stars would be shining brightly in the heavens ere the busy blessed work was done, and within a few hours a city which numbered many thousand inhabitants saw disease of every kind banished from its borders.

After the excitement and fatigue of such a day, Jesus may lay his head peacefully on his pillow, and take the rest that such labor has earned. But long before the others—While yet they are all sleeping in Simon's house around him—rising up a great while before day, he goes out into a solitary place to pray. Was it on his own account that Jesus thus retired? Was his spirit too much under the distracting influence which such a scene of bustle and excitement as he had passed through

* Luke iv. 40.

the day before, was fitted to exert? Did he feel the need to calm the inward tumult, by silent and solitary communion with Heaven? As we follow his footsteps, let us be careful to notice and to remember in what circumstances it was that Christ resorted to special, solitary, continued prayer. But in leaving Capernaum, alone and so early, Jesus had in view the state of others as well as his own. He was well aware how apt, in his case, the office of the healer, the wonder-worker, was to overshadow that of the teacher, the preacher of the glad tidings; how ready the inhabitants of Capernaum already were to hail and honor him in this one character, however little they might be disposed to regard or obey him in the other. He had done enough of the one kind of work, had got enough of that one kind of homage, there. And so, when, after an eager search for him, he is found,—and Simon and the disciples tell him that all men were seeking for him, and the people when they came up entreat him that he should not depart from them,* Jesus says to the one, “Let us go into the next town, that I may preach there also;” and to the other, “I must preach the kingdom of God to

* Compare Mark i. 36, 38, and Luke iv. 42, 43.

other cities also, for therefor am I sent." He did not, indeed, forsake the city that had treated him so differently from his own Nazareth. He chose it as the place of his most frequent residence, the centre of his manifold labors, the scene of many of his most memorable discourses and miracles. But now he must not rest on the favor which the healings of this wonderful day have won for him. And for a time he left Capernaum, and "went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease, among the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria : and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy ; and he healed them. And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan."*

We read of nine departures from and returns to Capernaum in the course of the eight-

* Matt. iv. 23-25.

een months of our Lord's Galilean ministry ; of three extensive tours through all the towns and villages of the district as the one now described ; and of five or six more limited ones. Had the three Evangelists not been so sparing in their notices of time and place ; had they not often shown such entire disregard to the mere order of time, in order to bring together incidents or discourses which were alike in character ; could we have traced, as we cannot do, the footsteps of our Saviour from place to place, from month to month, as he set forth on these missionary rounds through Galilee, made, let us remember, all on foot, we should have had a year and a half before us of varied and almost unceasing toil, the crowded activities of which would have filled us with wonder. As it is, a general conception of how these months were spent is all that we can reach. To give distinctness to that conception, let us remember what, in extent of surface and in the character and numbers of its population, that district of country was to which these pedestrian journeys of our Saviour were confined.

Galilee, the most northern of the three divisions of Palestine, is between fifty and sixty miles in length, and from thirty to forty in

breadth. A three-days' easy walk would take you from Nain, on the south, to Cæsarea Philippi in the north,—which seem to have been the limits in these directions of our Saviour's circuits. Less than two days' travel will carry you from the shores of the Sea of Galilee to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. Galilee presented thus an area somewhat larger than Lancashire, and somewhat smaller than Yorkshire. So far, therefore, as the mere distances were concerned, it would not take long—not more than a week or two—to travel round and through it. But then, in the Saviour's days, it was more densely populated than either of the English counties I have named. Josephus, who knew it well, speaks of 204 towns and villages, the smallest of them containing above 15,000 inhabitants. Making an allowance for exaggeration, the population of the province must have been about three millions,—as crowded a population as any manufacturing district in any of the western kingdoms of Europe now presents. And this population was of a very mixed character. If the majority were of Jewish descent, there were so many Phœnicians, Syrians, Arabs, Greeks, and others mingled with them, that we may be almost certain that Jesus never

addressed any large assembly in which there were not Gentiles as well as Jews. There cannot be a greater mistake than to imagine that, in selecting Capernaum, on the shores of the Lake of Gennesaret, as his head-quarters, and Galilee as his chosen field of labor, Jesus was retiring from the populous Judea to a remote and unfrequented region. In those days there was much more life and bustle in Galilee than in Judea. So far as both the numbers and character of its population were concerned, it was a much better, more hopeful theatre for such evangelistic labors as those of Jesus. The people, though no less national in their spirit, were much less infected with ecclesiastical prejudice. The seed had thus a better soil to fall upon. Though a Roman governor was placed over them, the Scribes and Pharisees had great power in Jerusalem, as they proved in effecting the crucifixion. Herod Antipas, who ruled over Galilee, had none of the jealousies of the Jewish Sanhedrim ; and, in point of fact, does not appear till the last to have taken much interest in, or in any way to have interfered with the proceedings of Jesus. So long as he confined himself to the work of a religious teacher, Herod had no desire to med-

dle with his doings ; and even if he had, Jesus had but to cross the Lake of Galilee to put himself beyond his power, by placing himself under the protection of Philip, the gentlest and most humane of the Herods.

Well adapted every way as Galilee was for our Lord's peculiar work,—the laying of the first foundations of the Christian faith, a faith which was to spread over the whole earth,—Capernaum was equally fitted to be the centre whence his labors were to radiate. Looked at, as you find it marked upon the map of Galilee, it does not occupy anything like a central position. But looked at in relation to the population and to the means of transit, a better centre could not have been selected. Wherever its site was, it lay on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, close upon, if not within, the plain of Gennesaret.* This plain,—three miles long, and two miles broad,—was then dotted with villages, teeming with population, and of the most exuberant fertility. “One may call the place,” says the Jewish historian, “the ambition of nature, where it forces those

* After visiting the ruins at Khan Mineyeh and Tell Hum, the writer had no hesitation in deciding in favor of the latter as more likely to have been the site of Capernaum.

plants that are naturally enemies to one another, to agree together ; it is a happy contention of the seasons, as if every one of them laid claim to this country." While all round its shores the Sea of Galilee saw towns and villages thronged with an agricultural and manufacturing population, itself teemed with a kind of wealth that gave large occupation to the fishermen. How numerous the boats were that once skimmed its surface, and how large the numbers employed as fishermen, may be gathered from the fact, that in the wars with the Romans, two hundred small vessels were once collected for the only naval action in which the Jews ever engaged. Remembering that the Lake is only thirteen miles long and five or six miles broad, it is not too much, perhaps, to say that never did so small a sheet of water see so many keels cutting its surface, or so many human habitations circling round and shadowing its waves, as did the Sea of Galilee in the days of Jesus Christ.

Now all is silent there ; lonely and most desolate. Till last year but a single boat floated upon its waters. On its shores, Tiberias in ruins, and Magdala composed of a few wretched hovels, are all that remain. You

may ride round and round the empty beach, and, these excepted, never meet a human being, nor pass a human habitation. Capernaum, Chorazin, Bethsaida are gone. Here and there you stumble over ruins, but none can tell you exactly what they were. They knew not, those cities of the Lake, the day of their visitation ; their names and their memory have perished.

THE END.

THE

MINISTRY IN GALILEE

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THE MINISTRY IN GALILEE.

I.

THE TWO HEALINGS—THE LEPER AND THE PARALYTIC.*

IN describing our Lord's first circuit through Galilee, the Evangelist tells us that "they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy ; and he healed them."† How many and how varied were the cures effected within the course of this first itineracy of our Lord can only be conceived by remembering how numerous were the towns and villages through which he passed, and how large the population

* Matt. viii. 2-4 ; Mark i. 40-45, ii. 1-12 ; Luke v. 12-26.

† Matt. iv. 24.

with which, one way or other, He was brought into contact.* Remembering this, we may believe that within a week or two after his first departure from Capernaum more healings were effected than the whole put together, of which any specific record has been preserved in the Four Gospels.

There was one form of disease, however, which is not noticed in St. Matthew's compendious description—a disease peculiar enough in its own character, but to which an additional peculiarity attached from the manner in which it was dealt with by the Mosaic law. However infectious, however deadly, however incurable, no disease but one was held to render its victim ceremonially unclean. Such uncleanness was stamped by the law upon the leper alone. This strange, 'creeping, spreading, loathsome, fatal disease appears to have been selected as the one form of bodily affliction to stand, in the legal impurity attached to it, and in the penalties visited on that impurity, as a type of the deep, inward, pervading, corrupting, destroying malady of sin.

Among the Jews the leper was excommunicated. Cut off from the congregation of the

* *Earlier Years*, p. 396.

people, he had to live apart, enjoying only such society as those afflicted with the same disease could offer. He had to bear upon his person the emblems of sorrow and of death; had to wear the rent garments which those wore who were weeping for the dead; to shave his head and keep it bare as those must do who had touched the dead—himself the living dead, for whom those emblems of mourning needed to be assumed. His face half covered, he had to go about crying, "Unclean, unclean," to warn all others off, lest they should come too near to him.

From what we know of the prevalence of this disease, it may be believed that there were many lepers in Galilee when our Lord made his first journey through it—gathered here and there into small and miserable communities. Even among these the tidings of the wonderful cures that were being effected would circulate, for the segregation was not so complete as to prevent all intercourse; and when these poor exiles from their fellows heard of many being healed whose complaints were as much beyond all human remedy as theirs, the hope might spring up in their hearts that the Great Healer's powers extended even to their case. But

which of them had faith enough to make the trial—to break through the legal fences imposed, and go into any of the cities in which Jesus was, and throw himself upon his sympathy for succor? One such there was—the first of those so afflicted who ventured to approach the Lord; and his case on that account was selected for special record by all the three Evangelists. He came to Jesus “when he was in a certain city.”* He had never seen the Lord before, or seen him only at a distance, among a crowd. He could have known or heard but little more about him than what the voice of rumor had proclaimed. Yet so soon as he recognizes him, see with what reverence he kneels and worships and falls on his face before him,† and hear how he salutes and pleads, “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.” Perhaps Jesus had never seen a man prostrate himself in his presence as this man did. Certainly, Jesus was never before addressed in words so few and simple, yet so full of reverence, earnestness, faith, submission. He called

* Had the name of that city been given, it might have helped to trace the course that Jesus was taking, but here, as in many other instances, the means of identification are denied.

† Luke vi. 12.

Jesus Lord. Was this the first time that Jesus had been so addressed? Sir, Rabbi, Master—these were the terms in which Andrew, and Nathanael, and Nicodemus, and the woman of Samaria, and the nobleman of Capernaum, had addressed him. None of them had spoken to him as this leper did. If, indeed, the miraculous draught of fishes by which Peter had been finally summoned away from his old occupation had already occurred, then it would be from his lips that this title was first heard coming, when he fell down at Jesus' feet exclaiming, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." That, however, is uncertain; but though it were true, how much had Simon to elevate his conception of Christ's character,—how little this leper! One wonders, indeed, how far he had got in his idea of who this Jesus—this healer of diseases—was. All that we can know is that he chose the highest title that he knew of, and bestowed it on him. "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst." No hesitation as to the power; no presumption or dictation as to the will. Upon that free will, upon that almighty power, he casts himself. "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Jesus instantly went forward—went close to him—

put forth his hand and touched him. His disciples hold back ; a strange shuddering sensation passes through the hearts of the onlookers, for, by the law of Moses, it was forbidden to touch a leper. He who touched a leper himself became unclean. Yet at once, without hesitation at the time—without acting afterwards as if he had contracted any defilement or required any purification—Jesus lays his hand upon one who was “full of leprosy,” and he says to him, “I will, be thou clean.” We lose a little of the power and majesty of our Saviour’s translation. Two words were spoken, (*Θέλω, καθαρίσθητι*,) the answer, the echo to the prayer ; two of the very words the man had used taken up and employed by Jesus in framing his prompt and gracious reply. No petition that was ever presented to Jesus met with a quicker, more complete, more satisfactory response. If our Lord’s conduct in this instance was regulated by the principle which we know so often guided it in the treatment he gave to those who came to him to be cured, great must have been the faith which was met in such a way. The readiness which Jesus had displayed to exert his power may partly have been due to this being the first case of a leper’s application

to him, and to his desire to show that no legal barrier would be allowed by him to stand in the way of his stretching forth his hand to heal all that were diseased. Yet the manner and the speech of the leper himself attest that he approached with no ordinary reverence, and petitioned with no ordinary faith. And, according to his faith, it was done unto him immediately. As soon as the words "I will, be thou clean," had come from the Saviour's lips, "the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed."

Did any further colloquy take place between the healed and the Healer? When, quick as lightning, through the frame the sensation passed of an entirely recovered health—when he stood up before the Lord, not a sign or symptom of the banished leprosy on his person—did no thanks burst from his grateful lips? or did our Lord say nothing to him about another healing which he was both willing and able to effect? We are not to infer that nothing of the kind occurred because nothing is recorded. The Evangelists have preserved alone the fact that, whatever words may have passed between them, Jesus was in haste to send the leper away, and in doing so gave him strict com-

mand to tell no man, but to go instantly and show himself to the priest, and offer the gifts that Moses commanded—the live birds and the cedar wood, and the scarlet and hyssop,—the means and instruments by which the purification of one declared free of leprosy was to be effected, and, relieved from the ban that had been laid upon him, he was to be reinstated in the possession of all the common privileges of society and citizenship. It is quite possible that, knowing the opposition which was already kindling against him, of which we shall presently see traces, Jesus may have desired that, without throwing out any hint of what had occurred which might precede him by the way and prejudice the judge, this man should repair as quickly as possible to the priest upon whom it devolved judicially to declare that he, so recently a man full of leprosy, was now entirely free of the complaint. It would be a testimony they could not well gainsay, if the fact of the departure of the leprosy were attested by the acceptance of the officer's gifts and his re-admission into the congregation of Israel. To prevent any possibility of this ratification of the reality of the cure being refused, Jesus might have enjoined silence and as speedy a

resort as possible to the priest ; the silence in such circumstances and with such a view prescribed, to last only till the desired end was gained. It would seem, however, from the result, that a more immediate object of the Saviour in laying this injunction upon the leper was to prevent the influx of a still greater crowd than that which was already oppressing him, and thus the hampering of his movements, and the absorption of too much of his time in the mere work of healing. For straightway, though charged to keep silence, the man when he went from Jesus could not restrain himself, but "began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that great multitudes came together to be healed of their infirmities, and Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places, and withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed."*

Again, a second time, as it was after that busy Sabbath in Capernaum, and before his first journey through Galilee, so now, at the close of this circuit and under the pressure of the multitude that beset his path, Jesus is

* Mark i. 45 ; Luke v. 15, 16.

driven forth from the city's crowded haunts to seek the solitary place, where, for some hours at least, he may enjoy unbroken communion with Heaven. To watch how and when it was that he took refuge thus in prayer, mingling devotion with activity, the days of bustle with the hours of quiet, intercourse with man in fellowship with God, let this be one of our cherished employments, following the earthly footsteps of our Lord: for nothing is more fitted to impress upon us the lesson,—how needful, how serviceable it is, if we would walk and work rightly among or for others around us, that we be often alone with our Father which is in heaven. A life all action will be as bad for our own soul as a life all prayer would be profitless for others. It is the right and happy blending, each in its due proportion, of stillness and of action, of work and prayer, which promotes true spiritual health and growth; and the weaker we are—the more easily at once distracted and absorbed by much bustling activity—so much the more of reflection, retirement, and devotion is needed to temper our spirit aright, and to keep it in harmony with that of our Lord and Master.

It is as impossible to tell how long a time it

took to make the first round of the Galilean towns and villages, as it is to define the line or circle along which Jesus moved. One high authority* concludes that it must have occupied between two and three months: another,† that it did not occupy more than four or five days. A period of intermediate length would probably be nearer the truth than either. On completing the circuit he returned to Capernaum, to take up his abode again in Peter's house. No rest was given him. The news of his return passed rapidly through the town, and straightway so many were gathered together "that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door." We must remember here, in order to understand what followed, the form of a Jewish house, and the materials of which its roof was ordinarily composed. There is not now, and there never seems to have been, much variety in the shape of a Syrian dwelling-house. Externally they all present the one dull uniform appearance of so many cubes or squares, seldom more than one story high—the outer walls showing no windows, nor any opening on the level of the ground except the

* Greswell.

† Ellicott.

door. On entering you pass through a lesser court, into which alone strangers are admitted, and then into the inner uncovered square into which the different apartments of the building open. In one corner, either of the outer or inner court—generally in the latter—there is a flight of steps conducting to the roof, a place of frequent resort at all times, and in the hotter months of summer turned into the sleeping-place of the household. The larger houses, in which the wealthier inhabitants reside, are all separate from one another. The lesser are often without any open court-yard, and built close together, so that you could pass readily from roof to roof. These roofs, always flat, are formed of bricks or tiles, or more generally of a compost of mud and straw, which a day's such rain as we often have would entirely demolish. Whatever the size of the houses be, or however they be situated relatively to each other, in one way or other, either by a staircase within the court—open, of course, only to the family to which the house belongs—or by a flight of steps without—which, when the houses are contiguous, may serve many households as a common means of access—the roof of each dwelling is easily reached. We do not need to settle what size

the dwelling was in Capernaum where Jesus took up his abode; we have only to imagine it to be of the usual and invariable Syrian type, to render the narrative intelligible.

A crowd assembles and fills the room of the house in which Jesus sits and teaches. At first this crowd is not so dense but that a single individual may pass through it, and in this way one and another of the diseased did press through, and the power of the Lord was there to heal them. But the crowd grew and thickened, it overflowed the room, it filled the street before the door, till every spot within reach of Christ's voice was occupied, and still there were new comers pressing in to try and catch a word; and to the work of healing within an effectual stop seems now to have been put. At this stage four men appear, bearing a sick man on a litter. They reach the crowd, they try to enter, they entreat, they expostulate; the thing is hopeless, that four men with such a burden ever shall get through. Is the project to be given up, the great chance lost? The bearers consult the man they carry. He is paralytic, cannot move a limb, can do nothing for himself. But he is in full possession of his faculties, the spirit is entire within. It was his eagerness to be healed,

still more than their readiness to help him, that had led these four men to lift him and carry him so far, and they are ready still to do anything—anything they can. Some one suggests—who so likely as the paralytic himself?—that they might get upon the roof, lift up so much of it as was required, and let down before Christ the bed on which the patient lay ; a singular, an extreme step to take, yet one to which men who were resolved to do anything rather than lose the opportunity, might not refuse to have recourse.

They all were strong in the belief that if only they could get at Jesus the cure would be effected, but the paralytic himself had an eager craving to get into the Saviour's presence, deeper than that springing from the desire to have his bodily ailment removed. The stroke that had taken the strength out his body had quickened conscience. He had recognized it as coming from the hand of God—it had awakened within him a sense of his great and manifold bygone transgressions. His sins had taken hold of him, and the burden was too heavy for him to bear. He hears of Jesus that he had announced himself as the healer of the broken-hearted ; that there is a Gospel, good tidings that he proclaims to the

poor in spirit. If ever a heart needed healing, a spirit needed comforting, it is his. And now, shall he be so near to him whom he has been so anxious to see, and yet to have to go away disappointed, unrelieved? He either himself suggests, or, when suggested, he warmly approves, the project of trying to let him down through the roof. The bearers second his desires. They make the effort—they succeed; noiselessly they lift the tiles—gently they let down the bed, and before Jesus, as he is speaking, the bed and its burden lie.

But now, before noticing how Jesus met this interruption of his discourse, and dealt with the man who was so curiously obtruded on his notice, let us look around a moment on the strangely constituted audience which Christ at this moment is addressing. Close beside him are his disciples—around him are many simple-minded, simple-hearted men, drinking in with wonder words they scarce half understand. But they are not all friendly listeners who are there, for there are “Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by,” some from Galilee, some from Judea, some even from Jerusalem. The last—what has brought them here? They come as spies—they come as emissaries from

the men who reproved Jesus at Jerusalem for his healing of another paralytic at the pool of Bethesda, on the Sabbath day, and who sought to slay him, "because he had not only broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God." Already these Pharisees counted Jesus a blasphemer, whose life they were seeking but the fit ground and occasion to cut off. And here are some of their number wearing the mask, waiting and watching, little knowing all the while that an eye is on them which follows every turn of their thoughts, and sees into all the secret places of their hearts. It is as one who thus thoroughly knew them, and would with his own hand throw a fresh stone of stumbling before their feet—as one who thoroughly knew also the poor, helpless, palsied penitent, who lies on the bed before him, that Jesus now speaks and acts. Meeting those pleading eyes that are fixed so importunately upon him, without making any inquiries or waiting to have any petition presented, "Son," he says to the sick of the palsy, "be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee." He would not have addressed him thus had he not known how greatly he needed to be cheered,

how gladly he would welcome the pardon, in what a suitable condition he was to have that pardon bestowed.

Let us believe then that, spoken with nicest adaptation to the man's state and wants, Christ's words were with power—that as quickly and as thoroughly as the words, “I will, be thou clean,” banished the leprosy from the one man's body, as quickly and as thoroughly these words banished the gloom and despondency from this man's soul. Thus spoken to by one in whom he had full confidence, he was of good cheer, and did assuredly believe that his sins had been forgiven him. If it was so—if his faith in Jesus as his soul's deliverer was as simple and as strong as, from the way in which Christ spoke, we presume it was—then too happy would he be at the moment when the blessedness of him whose sins are forgiven, whose iniquity is covered, filled his heart, to think of anything beside. He is silent at least, he is satisfied, he makes no remonstrance, he proffers no request. There is nothing going on within his breast that Jesus needs to drag forth to light, to detect and to rebuke. Not so with the Scribes and Pharisees, upon whom those words of Jesus have had a quite startling effect. They, too,

are silent ; nor, beyond the glances of wonder, horror, hate, that they hastily and furtively exchange, do they give any outward sign of what is passing in their hearts. But Jesus knows it all. They had been saying within themselves, "This man blasphemeth ;" they had been reasoning in their hearts, to their own entire satisfaction and to Christ's utter condemnation, saying, "Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?" Notwithstanding all their self-assurance, they must have been a little startled when, the thoughts of their hearts revealed, Jesus said to them, "Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee ; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?" He does not ask which was easier, to forgive sins or to cure a palsy, but which was easier, to say the one or to say the other, for he knew that they had been secretly thinking how easy it was for any man to say to another, Thy sins be forgiven thee, but how impossible it was for him to make good such a saying. "But that ye may know," he added, "that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise and

take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house." The man arose and departed to his own house—healed in body, healed in spirit—glorifying God. The people saw it, and were amazed, and were filled with awe; and they said to one another, "We never saw it in this fashion—we have seen strange things to-day." And "they glorified God which had given such power to men." The Scribes and Pharisees saw it, and had palpable evidence of the superhuman knowledge and superhuman power of Christ given to them—had a miracle wrought before their eyes in proof of Christ's possession of a prerogative which they were right in thinking belonged to God only, but they would not let anything convince them that the Son of Man had power on earth to forgive sins; and it was not long, as we shall see, ere new stumbling-blocks were thrown in their way, over which they fell.

Our Saviour, in bodily presence, has now passed away from us. He can touch us no more with his living finger; he banishes no more our bodily diseases with a word; but the leprosy of the heart—the spreading, pervading taints of ungodliness, selfishness, malignity, impurity—these it is his office still to cure; these it is our

duty still to carry to him to have removed ; and if we go in the spirit of him who said, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean, the cleansing virtue will not be withheld.

The Son of Man had power on earth to forgive sins ; he exercised that power ; he absolved at once the penitent of Capernaum from all his sins ; he caused that man to taste the joy of an immediate, gracious, free, and full forgiveness. What is to hinder our receiving the same benefit—enjoying the same blessing ? Has the Son of Man lost any of his power to forgive sins by his being no more upon this earth, his having passed into the heavens ? Is pardon a boon that he no longer dispenses, that he holds now suspended over our heads—a thing to be hoped for but never to be had ? No, let us believe that his mission on earth has not so failed in its great object ; that he is as willing as he is able to say and do for each of us what he said and did for the palsied man in Peter's house at Capernaum ; that he waits but to see us penitent and broken-hearted, looking to and trusting in him, to say in turn to each of us, "Son—Daughter—be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee."

II.

THE CHARGE OF SABBATH-BREAKING.*

IT was a common saying among the Jews, that whoever did any work on the Sabbath day, denied the work of the creation. The saying was grounded on the fact that one principal end of the Sabbatic institute was, by its continued and faithful observance, to preserve a knowledge of, and a faith in, the one Living and True God as the Creator of all things. As being a most explicit and expressive embodiment in outward act and habit of the faith of the Jewish people, that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and the sea and all that in them is, it was chosen by God as a fit and appropriate sign of the peculiar relationship towards Him into which that people had been brought—the peculiar standing which among other nations it was to occupy. “Six days

* Mark i. 1-31 ; John v. 1-47 ; Matt. xii. 1-14 ; John ix. 14 ; Luke xiii. 10-17 ; xiv. 1-6.

shalt thou labor, and do all thy work : but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God : in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor the stranger that is within thy gates ; that thy man-servant and thy maid-servant may rest as well as thou. And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched-out arm : therefore, the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day.”* “Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel forever.”† “Moreover also I gave them my Sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them. Hallow my Sabbaths ; that ye may know that I am the Lord your God.”‡

There was no rite, nor institution, not even circumcision, by which the Jews were more conspicuously distinguished from surrounding

* Deut. v. 13-15. † Exod. xxxi. 16, 17. ‡ Ezek. xx. 12, 20.

nations, and marked off as the worshippers of Jehovah, the Creator of the ends of the earth. Their Sabbath-keeping was a perpetual and visible token of the connection in which they stood to God, and of the great mission which, under him, they were set apart to discharge. But how was the Sabbath to be kept so as to serve this end? Looking back here to the original statutes, and to the earlier practice of the Jewish people, you will find that there was but one positive injunction given: the cessation from all manner of work. The rest enjoined, however, could not be the rest of total and absolute inactivity. The work from which they were to cease could not be every doing of the human hand. Obviously it was the work of men's ordinary occupation or trades, the work by which the hours of common-labor were filled by those engaged therein. There is, indeed, one prohibition, the only one, in which there is a specification of the kind of work to be desisted from, which would seem to point to a narrower interpretation of the original command. When Moses had gathered all the congregation of Israel together at the base of Sinai, and the people were about to enter on the construction of the ark and the tabernacle,

knowing with what hearty enthusiasm they were inspired, he prefaced his instructions as to the manner in which they should carry on the work, by saying, "Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you a holy day, a Sabbath of rest to the Lord ; ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations on the Sabbath day." They did not need to be told to kindle no fire for any ordinary culinary purposes. A double portion of the manna fell upon the day preceding the Sabbath, and they were to seethe and bake the whole of it, so that no preparation of food on the Sabbath was required. Issued under such peculiar circumstances, it seems not unreasonable to believe that the particular object of the Mosaic injunction was to check the ardor of those who might otherwise have been tempted to carry on the mouldings and the castings in gold and silver on the Sabbath as on other days : not that the Jews of all after generations were prohibited by Divine command from having a fire burning in their dwellings, for whatever purpose kindled, on the Sabbath day.

When we turn from what was prohibited to what was enjoined, we find a blank. One or two specific injunctions were indeed laid upon

the priests. The daily sacrifices were to be doubled, and the shew-bread baked upon the Sabbath was to be renewed. That there was no Sabbatism in the Temple became in this way a proverb. But for the people at large there were no minute instructions as to how the day was to be spent. It could not have been made imperative on them to assemble for public worship on that day, for during the times of the Jewish theocracy there was no place but one—the Temple—for such worship, and the meeting there each seventh day was impossible. It was not till after the captivity that synagogues were erected all over the land, in which weekly assemblages for worship did take place ; but that was done, not in obedience to any Divine command. It would seem, indeed, to have been the practice of the Jews, from the beginning, to gather round their prophets on the Sabbath days, and to avail themselves of such means of religious instruction as they could command. Parents took advantage of the rest to teach the law unto their children. But there was no peculiar religious observance prescribed. The day was spent in rest, in thankfulness, in gladness ; spent to a great extent as the festival days of other countries were

spent. Dressed in their best attire, indulging in better fare, it was to feasting rather than to fasting that the Sabbath was devoted. But, as the faith of the people grew weak, and their allegiance to their Divine Sovereign faltered, they grew neglectful of the Sabbath, and began to profane the day by breaking in upon that rest from all the ordinary occupations of life, which should have been observed. Thus it was that, among other distinctive marks of their peculiarity as a consecrated people, the only worshippers of the Great Creator, this one became obscured and well-nigh obliterated.

In the latest years of the Hebrew commonwealth, prophet after prophet was raised up to testify against those defections from the faith, among which that of neglecting and profaning the Sabbath occupied a conspicuous place. After the captivity, on the restoration of the Jews to their own land, the same lax habits prevailed. "In those days," says Nehemiah, "saw I in Judah some treading wine-presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold vict-

uals.”* Nehemiah did more than testify. Alert and decisive in all his movements, he had the gates of Jerusalem shut when it began to be dark before the Sabbath, and kept them shut till the Sabbath was over. It is in the light of his sayings and doings that we are to interpret the utterance from the lips of Jeremiah: “Thus saith the Lord: Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem; neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath day, neither do ye any work, but hallow ye the Sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers.”†

A singular change came over the spirit and habits of the Jewish people after the restoration from the Babylonian captivity. Previously, in the days of the kings and prophets, they were ever and anon showing a tendency to idolatry; subsequently no such tendency appears. Previously they had been neglectful of many of the distinctive rites and ceremonies of their faith; subsequently they became strict and punctilious in their observance of them. Great national calamities—the persecution under the successors

* Neh. xiii. 15.

† Jer. xvii. 21.

of Alexander the Great, the wars of the Maccabees, the aggression of the Romans, the ascent into power of the Idumean family of the Herods, the establishment of the schools of the Rabbis—all conspired to intensify the national pride and religious bigotry of the Jews; who, as they had nothing but the old laws and traditions to cling to, clung to them with all the more tenacious grasp. The sect of the Pharisees arose, and carried the popular sympathy along with it. Everything regarded as purely and peculiarly Judaic was exaggerated. Punctilious observance of the old ritual was the one great merit compensating for all defects; whilst around the simpler statute-law of Moses there arose an oral or traditional law, growing continually in bulk and overshadowing the primitive Mosaic institute. It had been a less evil had the original enactments of that institute continued to be rightly and liberally interpreted. Instead of this, the narrowest and most rigid interpretation was the only one allowed; and upon each statute as so interpreted additions and explanations were heaped, of such a character as to turn more and more the keeping of them into a mere matter of external routine and outward performance. So fared it

with the old, broad and benignant law as to the Sabbath. Its primary injunction, "Thou shalt do no manner of work," was falsely held as aimed at all kinds of work whatever; no less than thirty-nine kinds or classes of work being specified as involved in the prohibition. It was ruled thus that grass should not be trodden on the Sabbath, for the bruising of it was a species of harvest work; that shoes with nails should not be worn, as that was the carrying a burden. To what absurd excesses such a spirit of interpretation led may be gathered from the single instance of its being actually laid down in the Mishna that a tailor must not go out with his needle near dusk on the eve of the Sabbath, lest he should forget and carry it with him on the Sabbath. In all this there was not only a wrong rendering of the Mosaic precept, but beyond, and much worse than that, there was the erection of a false standard of duty, a false test of piety—the elevation of the outward, the positive, the ceremonial, over the inward, the moral, the spiritual; the putting of the letter that killeth above the spirit which maketh alive.

Now let us see how, born and brought up among a people filled with such prejudices,

Jesus regulated his conduct. He knew that healing the diseased on the Sabbath day would be regarded as a breach of the Divine law, would shock the Pharisees, and run counter to the convictions of the great mass of the community. Did he abstain from effecting cures upon that day? He might easily have done so, as no applications were made to him. Much as they desired to have the benefit conferred, the people shrank from bringing their diseased to be cured on the holy day. Jesus had only to meet their prejudices by doing nothing. But he did not choose to be thus silent and acquiescent. No less than seven miracles are recorded as wrought by him on the Sabbath day, some of them among the most conspicuous and memorable in his ministry:—1. The cure of the paralytic on the occasion of his second visit to Jerusalem. 2. The cure of the demoniac in the synagogue of Capernaum, when opening his ministry in Galilee. 3. The cure of Peter's wife's mother, the same afternoon, in the same city. 4. The cure of a man with a withered hand, a few Sabbaths afterwards, in the same city. 5. The cure of the man born blind, who sat begging in the porch of the Temple at Jerusalem. 6. The cure of a wo-

man who had the spirit of infirmity for eighteen years. 7. The cure of the man with a dropsy who happened to be present at a feast given on a Sabbath day in the house of a chief publican, an invitation to which Jesus had accepted. Not one of these was effected in answer to any application made. They were all spontaneous, done of Christ's own free will and motion. Nor was there, in regard to most of them, any urgency, requiring that the healing should have been done that day, if done at all. Jesus might have chosen another day rather than the Sabbath to walk through the crowded porches of Bethesda. The impotent man had lain too long there to make a day earlier or a day later of much moment to him. It was the same with the blind beggar of Jerusalem : and these were the two instances of cures upon the Sabbath day which drew most public notice and were attended with the most important results. But Jesus was not content with simply relieving the sufferers on these occasions. He did himself, or he bade his patients do, what he was well aware would attract the eye and draw down upon it the condemnation of the priesthood. How easy had it been for him at Bethesda to have cured the man in passing, and told

him to lie quietly there till next day, so that no one should have known anything of the cure. But he told him to take up his bed and carry it through the streets, obtruding thus on the eye of the spectators an act which seemed to be an open and flagrant breach of the command delivered by Jeremiah, "Thus saith the Lord: Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day."* In curing the man born blind he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle, and anointed the eyes of the man with the ointment, and said unto him, Go wash in the pool of Siloam; both which acts, the making and applying the ointment, and the washing in the sacred fountain, were deemed to be desecrations of the Sabbath. It thus appears that he not only voluntarily selected the Sabbath as the day for performing the cures, but wrought them in such a way, or accompanied with such directions, as forced them into notice, and involved others as well as himself in what was considered a crime of the deepest dye—involving in fact the penalty of death.

The paralytic of the porches and the blind

* Jer. xvii. 21.

ON SABBATH-BREAKING.

beggar of the wayside could both indeed plea in their justification the command of their healer, and Jesus took upon himself the full responsibilities of their acts. In meeting the first challenge of his conduct as a Sabbath-breaker, Christ was content, as appears from the narrative in the fifth chapter of St. John's Gospel, to rest his defence on his Sonship to the Father—a sonship that might seem to entitle him to claim and exercise a liberty of action to which no other might legitimately aspire. But, putting that Sonship aside, had Christ's act in healing, and the man's act in carrying his bed, been violations of the Sabbath law? This question was left unsettled by our Lord's first defence of himself against the accusation of the Pharisees. It served to bring the matter out, not as one of Christ's peculiar character, position, and rights, but as one having reference simply to the true interpretation of the existing law, when it was an act of the disciples on which the charge of Sabbath-breaking was founded. One Sabbath day he and his disciples were walking through some cornfields in which the grain was already white unto the harvest. The disciples being an hungered, began to pluck the ears of corn, to rub them in their hands, and eat. In

doing so, there was no violation by them, as there would be with us, of the rights of property. The old Jewish law ran thus:—"When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbor, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbor's standing corn."*

The law and practice of Palestine continue to be this day what they were so many thousand years ago. We travelled in that country once in spring. Our course lay through it before the ears of corn were full, but nothing surprised us more than the liberties which our guides took in riding through the fields and letting their horses eat as much of the standing corn as they pleased. We felt at first as if we were trespassers and thieves, but were relieved by finding that it was done under the eye, and with the full consent, of the owners of the crops. There was nothing wrong, then, in what the disciples of Jesus did. But it was done upon the Sabbath day, which was thought to be unlawful. And there were men who were watching—dogging the steps of Jesus and his disciples, perhaps to see whether in their walk they

* Deut. xxiii. 25.

would exceed the distance to which a Sabbath-day's journey had been restricted. So soon as those lynx-eyed men observe what the disciples were doing, they inform the Pharisees, who go to Jesus to say, "Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the Sabbath day." They were only expressing the popular belief which they had helped to form. It had come to be generally believed that plucking and rubbing in the hand ears of corn was work that the Sabbath law condemned. Jesus threw a shield of defence over the act of his disciples by referring to the conduct of David, esteemed to be a model of Jewish piety. Once when he and his men were an hungered, he had not scrupled to break the rules, to violate the sanctity of the Holy Place. We may believe that it was on a Sabbath day he did so. Doubly appropriate, therefore, was the reference to it ; but it was not essential to Christ's argument that the act was done upon the Sabbath day. What Christ mainly desired by his allusion to the case of David, was to establish the principle that the pressure of hunger vindicated the setting aside for the time of the strictest even of the Temple regulations. But these regulations, and the whole Temple service which they sus-

tained, were held to be of such superior importance to the Sabbatic law, that when both could not be kept, the latter had to give way. A vast amount of what elsewhere would have been accounted as Sabbath-breaking went on every Sabbath day in the Temple. If the Temple, then, carried it over the Sabbath, and hunger carried it over the Temple, as free of fault as David and his men were—so free of fault were Christ's disciples. To whatever their hunger was due, it had come upon them owing to their connection with him ; and if in Jerusalem the Temple towered above the Sabbath and threw its protection over its servants engaged in its work, here in the fields of Galilee was one greater than the Temple, throwing his protection over his disciples as they followed him. They, too, must be acquitted.

But it is not enough that the act of his disciples be in this way vindicated. Our Lord seizes the opportunity to let the Pharisees know that they had mistaken the spirit and object of the ceremonial law, and particularly of the Sabbatic institute. "But if ye had known," he added, "what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless." Jesus quotes here

from the Book of Hosea* a saying which more than once he repeated. It was not a solitary one. Much to the same effect were the words which the first of the Prophets addressed to the first of the Kings: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."† The wisest of the Kings responds to the words of Samuel in the proverb, "To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice."‡ Isaiah and Jeremiah put words of the same import into Jehovah's lips: "I delight not, saith the Lord, in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well." "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings or sacrifices; but this thing commanded I them, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people; and

* Hos. vi. 6.

† 1 Sam. xv. 22.

‡ Prov. xxi. 3.

walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you."* There is something singularly impressive in hearing such emphatic testimonies to the comparative worthlessness of sacrifices and offerings, of all merely ritualistic observances issuing from the heart of the old Jewish economy ; spoken at the very time when all those statutes and ordinances of the Lord were in full force, that define so minutely, and prescribe so peremptorily the formalities of Jewish worship.

Jesus, in quoting one of these testimonies, and applying it to the case of his disciples' conduct, puts Sabbath-keeping, so far as it consisted merely in abstaining from this or that kind of work, in the same category as sacrifice, regarding it as part of that formal and external mode of honoring and serving the Supreme which ought never to stand in the way of any work of need or of benevolence. Had the Pharisees but listened to the voice of their own prophets, they would have understood this ; but, deaf to that voice, they had drawn tighter and tighter the bonds of the required Sabbatic service, ever narrowing the field of what was al-

* Isa. i. 11, 16 ; Jer. vii. 21, 23.

lowable on the seventh day, till they had laid a yoke upon men's shoulders too heavy for them to bear. From this yoke, at all hazard to himself, Jesus will relieve his countrymen, proclaiming in their ears the great and pregnant truth, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." The Sabbath is but a means to an end; that end is, man's present comfort, his spiritual and eternal good. Wherever, therefore, the keeping of the Sabbath in the way prescribed, instead of promoting would frustrate that end, it was more honored in the breach than in the observance. It was never to be regarded as in itself an end. Apart from the physical, social, moral, and religious benefits to be thereby realized, there was no merit in painfully doing this one thing, or rigorously abstaining from that other. The Sabbath was made to serve man, but man was not made to serve or be a slave to the Sabbath. And just because it was an institution which, when rightly used, is so eminently fitted to minister to man's present and eternal good, the Son of Man, who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, as Head of our humanity, to render to it the greatest of all services, and to take all other servants of it under his care and keeping,

would show himself to be Lord also of the Sabbath.

It was in this character that Jesus acted on the Sabbath which so closely followed the incident of the walk in the corn-fields. In some unnamed synagogue he sat and taught. A man whose right hand was withered stood before him. Had he been brought there to serve the purposes of these watchful enemies, who wished, not simply to have his own acts to bring up against him, (for these, as the acts of a prophet, might be regarded as privileged,) but to get from him a distinct categorical reply to the question, whether it was lawful for any man who had the power of healing to exert it on the Sabbath day? So soon at least as they saw his eye fastened upon the withered hand, and before he did anything, they interpose their question, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath days?" The question is met by an appeal to their own practice: "What man shall there be among you that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath days." But they shall not only have its lawfulness asserted, they shall see

the good done before their eyes. Jesus bids the man with the withered hand stand forth. But ere he cures him he turns to the Scribes and Pharisees and puts in his turn a question cutting deep into their deceitful hearts: "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days,"—as I am doing—"or to do evil?"—as ye do in suspecting and maligning me;—"to save life,"—as I do—"or to kill,"—as ye are doing who are already meditating my death? There is no answer to this question. They stand speechless before him, but unconvinced and unrelenting.

"And Jesus looked around about on them with anger." The meek, and the gentle, and the patient one! What was it that filled his breast with such a glow of indignation, that it broke out in this unwonted look of anger? It was the sight of men, who, laying hold of one of his Father's most merciful institutes—that which for man and beast, and the whole laboring creation, provided a day of returning rest, amid whose quiet the reflecting spirit of man might rise to the contemplation of its higher ends and its eternal destiny—instead of looking at the primary command to keep holy each seventh day, as it stood enshrined among those precepts which enjoined a supreme love

to God, and a corresponding love to man, and allowing this one positive and external institute to receive its interpretation from those immutable moral laws among which it was interposed, had exalted it into a place of isolation and false importance, attaching a specific virtue to the bare outward keeping of the letter, magnifying to the uttermost the minutest acts of bodily service ; finding therein the materials which the spirit of self-righteousness employed for its own low and sordid purposes, an instrument which it would have used for defrauding the poor and the needy and the diseased of that help which the hand of charity was ready to render ;—such was the source of that anger with which Jesus looked around about on the Scribes and Pharisees.

III.

THE CALLING TO THE APOSTOLATE OF ST. PETER,
ST. ANDREW, ST. JAMES, ST. JOHN, AND ST. MAT-
THEW.*

EXTRAORDINARY success naturally excites exaggerated hopes. A sudden blaze of prosperity has blinded the strongest human eye. Nor can you point to any great enterprise, signally successful at its outset, of which you will not find it true that those engaged in it were, for a short time at least, seduced into exorbitant expectations. If ever any success might have operated in this way, it was that which attended the close of the first year of our Lord's ministry. The whole population of Galilee, a community of from two to three millions, stirred in its depths the excitement spreading all around, reaching eastward beyond the Jordan, westward

* Luke v. 1-11; Matt. iv. 18-22, ix. 9-17; Mark i. 16-20, ii. 14-22; Luke v. 27-30.

to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, southward to the hill country of Judea. It is no longer, as in the days that followed the baptism by the banks of the Jordan, an obscure Nazarene travelling with a few friends who had attached themselves to his person, it is the great Worker of miracles, the Healer of all diseases, the Caster-out of devils, surrounded and pressed in upon so closely by admiring and enthusiastic crowds, that to get a few quiet hours he had to steal them from sleep—to spend them in the mountain solitudes. It is no longer in the synagogue and on the Sabbath days alone that audiences are to be found ; everywhere and at all times assemblages, often too large for his addressing them, are ready to hang upon his lips. But you search in vain through all the wonderful excitement and popularity which followed our Lord in his first circuit through Galilee, for the slightest evidences that any false or exaggerated expectations were cherished. The specious appearances that then surrounded Him never dazzled nor deceived his eye. He knew from the beginning how soon the sudden fervors of the first great commotion would subside—how soon the tide that swelled so high would ebb away. He knew

that had he left to themselves those among whom he lived and labored, had he done nothing to bind some of them to himself by ties closer and stronger than any they naturally or spontaneously would have formed, he would at the close have been left alone. And therefore it was that at the very time when his popularity was at the highest, he took the first step towards binding to himself twelve chosen men in links which, besides all the pains that he took himself to forge and fasten them, needed the welding forces of the day of Pentecost to make them strong enough to bind them everlastingly to him.

To these twelve men, an office, secondary only to the one he himself discharged, was to be assigned. They were always to be with him, the spectators and reporters of all he said, and did, and suffered. They were to share and multiply his labors, to protect and relieve him from the pressure to which he was exposed. For a short season he was to send them from his side, to teach and to work miracles as he did himself, that a short fore-trial might be made of the work in which they were afterwards to be engaged. After his death they were to be the witnesses of the Resurrection

the expounders of that Gospel which needed the great deace to be accomplished ere in its full measure it could be proclaimed. By their hands the foundations of the Church were to be laid. Let us note, then, the first steps in their calling to this high office.

On his return from the Temptation, by the banks of the Jordan, and on their way thence to Galilee, five men—Andrew, John, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael—had temporarily attached themselves to Jesus. Of these, only one—Philip—had been called by our Lord himself to follow him. The others were attracted by what they had heard about him, or saw in him. At first, however, it was but a loose and uncertain bond that united them to Jesus. All the five were present, we may believe, at the marriage feast at Cana, and may have gone up with him to Jerusalem, to the first Passover which he attended after his baptism. But they did not remain in constant attendance upon his person. After his first circuit of Galilee, when his fame was at its height, three of them had returned to their ordinary occupation as fishermen. With them a fourth became associated. As Andrew had brought his brother Peter to Jesus, we may imagine that the same service

had been rendered by John to his brother James ; so that all the four were already well known to Christ, had enjoyed much familiar intercourse with him, and had appeared often openly as his followers. Perhaps it was the common bond of discipleship to him which in the course of the year had drawn them into closer union with one another. Peter and Andrew had previously resided at Bethsaida, a town at the northeastern extremity of the lake, but they had now removed to Capernaum, had entered into partnership with the two sons of Zebedee, and had been plying their craft together on the lake, when all the four were pointedly and specially summoned, in a way they never before had been, to follow the Lord.

The difficulties that many have felt in harmonizing the narratives in the fourth chapter of St. Matthew and first chapter of St. Mark, with that in the fifth chapter of St. Luke, have led them to believe that two such summonses were given ; that on the first occasion—the one referred to by the two former—the four had answered the appeal by an immediate throwing up of their occupation by the lake side, but that they had again, and not long afterwards, resumed it, requiring a still more impressive

instrumentality finally to sever the bonds. We are inclined rather to believe that all which the three Evangelists relate occurred in the course of the same morning, and that it happened somewhat in this manner :

The day had dawned. From his solitary place of rest and prayer, somewhere among the neighboring hills, Jesus had come down to the quiet beach as the first light of the morning struck across the placid bosom of the lake. The unproductive toil of the night was nearly over for the fishermen. Out a little distance upon the waters, Peter and Andrew had cast in their net for the last time as Jesus approached the shore. But his progress was interrupted by the crowds hurrying out of Capernaum, so soon as it was known that he was there. Through these crowds—stopping occasionally to address a few words to them—Jesus made his way to one or other of those small creeks or inlets, still to be seen there, where a boat could ride a few feet from the shore, and the people, seated on either side and before the speaker, could listen quietly to one addressing them from the boat. Here, in this creek, two boats were drawn up, the property of the four—the two pairs of brothers already spoken of.

The fishermen had gone out of them, and were mending their nets; not so far away, however, but that one of them, Peter, noticing the Lord's approach, had returned. Entering into his boat, Jesus asked Peter to thrust out a little from the land; and when this was done, he sat down and taught the people out of the boat. The teaching over, Jesus turned to Peter, and said to him, "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught"—a singular command to come from one who knew so little—might be supposed to care so little—about the fisherman's craft. Still it came so decidedly from one whom Peter had already learned to address as Master, that, with a few words of explanation, indicative of the smallness of his hope, he prepares to comply with it. "Master," he says, "we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net." He calls his brother, and launches out—lets down the net. At once such a multitude of fishes is enclosed, that the boat begins to fill—the net to break. Excited by what they had seen, James and John had by this time launched their boat, and Peter beckons them to come and help. They come, but all the help they can give is scarce

sufficient. Both boats are filled, and almost sinking as they get ashore.

Peter had already seen Jesus do wonderful things—turn water into wine, eject the devil from the demoniac, raise his own wife's mother from the fever-bed; but somehow this wonder came home to him as none of them had done—wrought in his own vessel, with his own net, in the way of his own calling, after his own fruitless toil. Never had the impression of a Divine Power at work in his immediate presence taken such a hold of him. Never had the sense of his being in close contact with One in whom such power resided come so upon his spirit. Astonishment, fear, humiliation—the impression, not of his weakness only, but of his sinfulness—of his unworthiness to stand in such a presence—fill and overwhelm his open, ardent, impressible spirit. He falls at Jesus' knees, as he sat there in the boat, quietly watching all the stir and bustle of the fishermen; and he gives vent to the feeling that for a moment is uppermost, as he exclaims, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" And ever still, when the first clear and overpowering revelation is made to any man of an Almighty Being compassing his path, besetting him before and behind, lay-

ing his hand upon him,—ever when the first true and real contact takes place of the human spirit with the living God as the Being with whom we have so closely and constantly to do, will something like the same effect be realized. So was it with him who said, “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee ; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” So was it with him who said, “Woe is me ! for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips : for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.”

“Depart from me.” Nothing could have surprised Peter more than the Lord’s taking him at his word—then and forever after turning his back upon him. No man then living would have felt such a forsaking more. Wishing to express how unfit he felt himself for such a presence, Peter, with his wonted rashness, had said more than he really meant. He asks Christ to go, yet he clings to him. “I am a sinful man, O Lord.” Jesus knows that better than Peter does. Peter will know it better when the Lord looks at him in the judgment-hall, and he goes out to weep over his denials. But Jesus knows, also, that it is because he is so sinful a man he

must not be forsaken. And though he is so sinful a man, yet still he may be chosen to stand in closest relationship to his master. "Fear not," said Jesus to him; "from henceforth thou shalt catch men."

The words of direction, assurance, promise, addressed in the first instance to Peter alone, were soon repeated to his three associates. The shore was reached, the boats hauled up, the fish disposed of, James and John had carried the broken nets away to a little distance to mend them, when first to the one pair of brothers, and then to the other, Jesus said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." And immediately they left boats and nets, and two of them their father, and forsook all, and followed him. We may think it was not much that they had to leave, but it was their all; and the promptness and entireness of their relinquishment of it shows what power over them the Saviour had already got—what a readiness for service and for sacrifice was already in them. And these were the four men who ever after stood most closely associated with Jesus—the four who stand at the head of every list of the twelve Apostles.

It was not indeed till some time after this

that, along with the other eight, they were set apart to the peculiar office of the Apostolate. This calling of them away from their former avocations, this attaching of them permanently to his person, was a marked step toward their installment in that position. It was the same with Matthew, the publican. The high road from Damascus southward to Judea and Egypt ran from the slopes of Mount Hermon down to the northern extremity of the Sea of Galilee, and for a short distance skirted along the north-western shore of the lake, passing through Capernaum. On the side of this road, close to the lake, stood the booth in which Matthew sat levying the toll on the passengers and their goods. He was one of a hated and degraded class. The payment of the taxes exacted by the foreigners under whose rule they were, irritated to the last degree the Jews, who regarded it as a visible sign and token of their bondage. The strong feeling thus excited spent itself on all who had anything to do with the collection of these taxes. No Jew who desired to stand well with his fellow-countrymen would be a tax-gatherer. The office was commonly held by foreigners, or by those who cared but little for a purely Jewish reputation.

Matthew was a Jew, yet he had become a publican, and now he is sitting at the receipt of custom as Jesus passed by. We know nothing of his personal character or previous habits. Considering that a year at least had passed since Jesus had first appeared as a public teacher in Galilee—that so prominent a part of his ministry had been conducted in the very neighborhood in which Matthew lived—it may be regarded as a violent supposition that there had been no previous acquaintance and intercourse between him and our Lord. It would be more in keeping with Christ's conduct in other instances to imagine that, so far as his occupation had permitted, Matthew had already appeared as a follower of the new teacher, had shown himself to have been favorably affected towards him. However it was, Jesus saw in him a man who, under right teaching and training, would be well suited for the high office he intended to confer upon him; and so, despite of the invidious office he now held, Jesus stopped as he passed by—said, "Follow me:" and "he left all, rose up, and followed him," throwing up thus a lucrative engagement, and casting in his lot with the small but growing band which Jesus was forming.

So soon as it was known that a publican had not only been seen in the following of Jesus—which might have occurred and occasioned no remark—but that Jesus had actually selected a publican and invited him to become one of his immediate attendants, a great commotion among the Scribes and Pharisees arose. It was a public scandal, an offence against all propriety, that one pretending to be a religious guide of the people—one preaching the Kingdom of God—should call a publican to his side; and take him into his confidence. Bad enough that he should himself be seen breaking the Sabbath and encouraging his disciples to do so likewise, but to pass by all the respectable inhabitants of Capernaum—so many of whom were conspicuous for the strictness of their observance of all the Jewish ordinances,—and to confer such a mark of favor upon a man with whom none of them would associate—what was to be thought of such an act? But the worst had not yet come. Either instantly upon his throwing up his office, or a few days thereafter, this Matthew makes a feast—a farewell one, it would seem—to which a number of his old friends and associates were invited, and there Jesus and his disciples were to be

seen sitting among the other guests. The Pharisees could not stand this. They did not venture, indeed, to go and openly reproach Christ personally with it. They were smarting too keenly under the recent rebuke they had got from him to have courage to do so, but they go to his disciples, and they say to them, "Why eateth your master with publicans and sinners?" Jesus does not leave it to the disciples to reply. As in so many other instances, he takes the matter into his own hands, and, half in irony, half in earnest, he says to them, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that be sick." They thought themselves the hale and healthy ; they spake of these publicans and sinners as corrupt and diseased ;—why, then, blame him if he, as the great Physician, went where his services were most required? It was sinners, not the righteous, that he came to call to repentance. If they needed no repentance, why blame him if he went to call those whose ears were open to his entreaties? But were they, indeed, so much better than those whom they despised? The difference between them was far more an outward, a ceremonial, than an inward, a moral, a spiritual one. Many of these poor publicans

and sinners—excommunicated though they might be—very careless about religious rites—were men of simpler, truer, more honest natures, kindlier in their dispositions, and in a sense, too, more devout, than many of these pretentious pietists. “Go,” said Jesus to those who imagined themselves to be righteous and despised others—“Go, and learn what that meaneth : I will have mercy and not sacrifice”—mercy rather than sacrifice if the two be put in comparison ; mercy alone, and no sacrifice, if the two are put in opposition—mercy among publicans, and sinners rather than sacrifice or any amount of ceremonial observances among Scribes and Pharisees.

But now another class interferes, to make common cause with the Pharisees. Some of the disciples of John the Baptist had early seen the superiority of Jesus, and at their master’s own instance had enrolled themselves among his followers. But others stood aloof, having more in them of the old Judaic spirit—attracted as much by the ascetic habits of the Baptist as by anything about him—recognizing in the fasts that he kept, the prayers that he himself offered and taught his disciples to offer, a return to a still purer and stricter piety than even

that which the Pharisees practised. It was a strange and repulsive thing to such, at the very hour when their master was cast into prison and they were mourning and fasting more than usual on this account, to see Jesus and his disciples going about eating and drinking—nay, accepting invitations to festive entertainments in publicans' houses. St. Matthew tells us that these disciples of John went at once to Jesus with their complaint. St. Mark completes the picture by informing us that the Pharisees joined with them in the complaint. Nothing more likely than that when the one saw how differently the discipleship of Jesus was developing itself from what they had expected, they should rather fall back upon the austerity of Pharisaism, with its frequent fastings and many prescribed exercises of devotion—nothing more natural than that the Pharisees should seize upon the occasion and ally themselves with the followers of the Baptist, to aim thereby a fresh blow at Christ's authority and influence over the people. Christ's answer meets both sets of complainers. "And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall

be taken from them, and then shall they fast.”* In the last testimony that the Baptist had borne to Jesus had he not said, “He that hath the bride is the bridegroom ; but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice.” The position that John had thus claimed for himself, those disciples against whom the complaint was lodged were now occupying. They were the friends of the bridegroom—standing and hearing and rejoicing—was it a time for them to mourn and to fast? The days were to come when the bridegroom should be taken away from them, then should they fast—the fasting flowing spontaneously, unbidden, from the grief. There is no general command here prescribing fasting, but simply a prophecy, referring to a peculiar and brief period in the history of the Lord’s disciples ; a prophecy, however, rich in the intimation it conveys that all external acts and exercises, such as that of fasting, should spring naturally out of some pure and deep emotion of the heart, seeking for itself an appropriate expression.

* Matt. ix. 15.

And now two short parables are added by our Lord: the first we may regard as peculiarly applicable to the disciples of John, the other to the Pharisees. "No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse."* No man would take a piece of new, raw cloth, which would not keep its form afterwards, which, when wet, would shrink, and sew it into the rent of an old garment; for ere long, when the new piece put in contracted, it would tear itself away from the old, and the rent would be made worse. And let not the disciples of the Baptist think that this new piece of their master's asceticism, with its new fastings and new prayers, was to be sewed, as they seemed to wish to do, into the old, worn-out, rent garment of Pharisaism. To try that, would be to try to unite what could not lastingly be conjoined; instead of closing up the rent, it would be to make it wider than ever. "Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved."†

* Matt. ix. 16.

† Matt. ix. 17.

No man taketh old, dry, withered skin bottles, such as then were used, and filleth them with new wine ; for the new wine would ferment, expand, and the bottles be burst, and the wine spilled and lost. And let not the Pharisees think that the new wine of the kingdom, the fresh spirit of love to God and man, which Jesus came to breathe into regenerated humanity, could be safely poured into their old bottles—into those forms and ceremonies of worship, dry as dust, and brittle as the thinnest and most withered piece of leather. No, there must be new bottles for the new wine, bottles that will yield to the pressure from within, and expand as the fermenting liquid which they contain expanded. And such new bottles as were thus required Jesus was finding—not in priestly men, chained up from childhood within priestly habits—not in those fixed and rigid Levitical institutions which the long years that had been draining them of their vitality had been stiffening into an immovable inflexibility : but in these fishermen, these publicans—natural, homely, unlearned men, open to imbibe his spirit in all its richness and expansiveness ; and in those simple forms and institutions of Christianity, which, cramped by no formal and immutable injunc-

tions, were to be left free to take such new outward shapes as the indwelling spirit might mould.

These two homely parables of our Lord, so specially adapted as they were to the circumstances in which they were uttered,—the individuals to whom they were addressed—do they not carry with them a lesson to all times and ages of Christianity? Do they not remind us of the absolute incompatibility of the legal and the evangelical obedience—the spirit of the Law and the spirit of the Gospel? There is a religion, of which the Pharisaism of Christ's days was an exaggerated specimen—the very heart and soul of which consists in penances, and prayers, and fastings,—in worship offered, in duties done, in sacrifices made, in mortifications inflicted and endured,—all to soothe an agitated conscience, to win a peace with God, to eke out a hope of heaven. To this the faith that is in Christ our Saviour stands directly and diametrically opposed—the one offering as a free gift what the other toils after as a reward; the one inviting us to begin where the other would have us end; the one putting forgiveness and acceptance with God in our hand and calling upon us, in the free spirit of his re-

deemed, forgiven, adopted children, to live, and serve, and in all things to submit to our Father which is in heaven—the other holding out the forgiveness and the acceptance away in the distance, and calling upon us, in the spirit of bondage, to labor all through life for their attainment; the one the old tattered garment, the other the piece of the new-made cloth.

And the wine of the kingdom, ever as it pours itself afresh from its fountain-head on high into the spirit of man, is it not a new wine that needs new bottles to contain it? If it be indeed the spirit of Christ which is working in hearts that have been opened to receive it, may we not safely leave it to its own operation there, and allow it to shape the vessel that holds it as it likes? Both, indeed, are needed, —the outward form, the inner spirit; nor will any wise or thoughtful man rashly touch, or mould into different shape the first, thinking thereby to improve the second; but neither will he hinder or hamper the second if by its own proper motion it is going on gently to remould the first.

IV.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.*

THE traveller from Jerusalem gets his first sight of the Sea of Galilee from the top of Mount Tabor. It is but a small corner of the lake that he sees, lying miles away, deep sunk among the hills. Descending from the height whence this first glimpse of the lake is got, the road to Tiberias leads over an elevated undulating plateau, the one marked feature of which is a curious double-peaked hill, rising about fifty or sixty feet above the general level of the surrounding table-land, and sloping down on its eastern side into the plain of Gennesaret. From the two prominences it presents this hill is called the Horns of Hattin—Hattin being a village at its base. It overlooks the lake and plain. You see Capernaum from its summit,

* Matt. v. vi. vii.; Luke vi. 20-49.

lying across the valley about seven miles off. As seen again from Capernaum and the plain, it appears as the highest and loneliest elevation that rises upon that side of the lake. It would naturally be spoken of by the inhabitants of Capernaum and its neighborhood, even as St. Matthew speaks of it, as *the* mountain. It would naturally be the place to which any one seeking for solitude would retire. When somewhere in its neighborhood there came around our Lord "a great multitude of people out of all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the sea-coast of Tyre and Sidon, and from Galilee and Decapolis, and from Idumea and from beyond Jordan,"* and when, seeking relief from the pressure, it is said that he went up into a mountain, no one so likely to be the one referred to by the Evangelist as the Horns of Hattin,—to which, as the supposed place of their utterance, the name of the Mount of the Beatitudes has for ages been given.

The night upon this mountain was spent by Christ in prayer—alone perhaps upon the higher summit, the disciples slumbering below. At dawn he called them to him, and out of

* Luke vi. 17; Mark iii. 8; Matt. iv. 25.

them he chose the twelve, and ordained them "that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach." But on what principle was the selection made? in what manner was the ordination effected? It may be presumed that some regard was had to the personal qualifications of those whom the Lord chose for this high office. We know indeed too little of any but two or three of the twelve to trace the special fitness of the human instrument for the work given it to do. Of all but one, however, we may believe that such fitness did exist. But how came that one to be numbered with the rest? It is possible that Judas may have done much to obtrude himself, or that others may have done much to obtrude him upon the notice of the Saviour. We read of one who, with great professions of attachment, volunteered to become a disciple, saying to Jesus, "Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest;" whom Jesus neither rejected nor welcomed, meeting his declaration of adherence with the ominous words, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." If, as some have thought, the man who came forward in this way and pressed

himself into the discipleship were Judas—if he was a man of acknowledged ability and considerable influence, whom no one at the time had the slightest reason to suspect, who was welcomed by all the other disciples, and commended by them to their Master as a most desirable associate—if the rejection of such a man in such circumstances would have seemed to be an act of caprice without known or apparent reason, this might serve perhaps in some slight degree to explain to us how Judas came at first to be numbered with the twelve. Many will feel as if there were something like profanity in any conjecture of this kind, and all will be satisfied simply to accept the fact that Jesus chose those twelve men, and yet that one of them was a devil.

Was it by simple designation to the office without any form or ceremony? or was it by laying of Christ's hand solemnly on the head of each, then gathering the circle round him and offering up a consecration prayer, that the apostles were set apart? We cannot tell. It is surely singular, however, that the manner of the ordination of the apostles by our Lord himself, in like manner as the ordination of the first presbyters or bishops of the Church by the

apostles, should have been left unnoticed and undescribed.

The ordination over, Jesus descended to a level spot, either between the two summits or lying at their base.* The day had now advanced, and the great multitude that had followed him, apprised of his place of retreat, poured in upon him, bringing their diseased along with them. He stood for a time healing all who were brought to him. Retreating then again to the mountain-side, he sat down. His disciples seated themselves immediately around him, and the great multitude stood or sat upon the level ground below.

Such were the circumstances under which the Sermon on the Mount was delivered. It may have been the first discourse of the kind which St. Matthew had heard; all the more natural, therefore, that he should have been directed to preserve so full a record of it. We have no authority for saying that it was actually the first formal and lengthened address delivered by our Lord. Many other longer or shorter discourses, to smaller or larger audiences, may Jesus have spoken during this period of his ministry. But this was the one

* Luke vi. 17.

selected by Divine Wisdom to be presented as a specimen or sample of our Lord's teaching, as addressed to mixed Galilean audiences in the earlier stages of his ministry. There was a change in his mode of teaching afterwards, even in Galilee, as there was a marked difference between all his discourses there, and those addressed to very different audiences in Jerusalem. Here upon the mount he had a vast concourse of people of all castes and from all quarters before him. Nearest to him were his own disciples. To them his words were in the first instance spoken, but they were meant to reach the consciences and hearts of the motley crowd that lay beyond.

Now, if there was one sentiment spread more widely than another throughout this crowd, it was the vague yet ardent expectation, beating then in almost every Jewish breast, of some great national deliverance—of the near approach of a new kingdom—the kingdom of God. Of this kingdom they had no higher conception than that it would be a free and independent outward and visible Jewish monarchy. And when it came, then should come the days of liberty and peace, of honor and triumph, and all kinds of blessedness for poor oppressed Judea

With what a delicate hand—not openly and rudely rebuking, yet laying the axe withal at its very roots—was this deep national prejudice now treated by our Lord. What could have run more directly counter to the earthly ambitious hopes, swelling up within the hearts of those around him? what could have served more effectually to check them, than the very first words which Jesus uttered? “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you.” How different the kind of bless-

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edness thus described from that which his hearers had been hungering and thirsting after! How different the kind of kingdom thus described from that which they had been expecting he should set up! And, apart from their special use and immediate service as addressed of old to the Galilean audience, these beatitudes remain to teach us wherein the only true, pure, lasting blessedness for man consists; not in anything outward, not in the gratification of any of our natural passions or desires, our covetousness, or our pride, or our ambition, or our love of pleasure; not in what we have, but in what we are in God's sight and in relation to his empire over our souls. The poor in spirit, those most deeply conscious of their spiritual poverty, their want of that which can alone find favor with God; the mourners whose grief is the fruit of guilt and unworthiness realized and deeply felt; the meek, who bow patiently and submissively to every stroke, whoever be the smiter; the hungerers and thirsters after righteousness, the pure in heart, the peace-makers, the persecuted for righteousness' sake—do we regard these as the happiest of our race? is theirs the kind of happiness upon which our heart is chiefly set, and which we are laboring

with our utmost efforts to realize? If not, however ready we may be to extol the pure and high morality of the Sermon on the Mount, we have failed to take in the first and one of greatest truths which it conveys, as to the source, and seat, and character, and conditions of the only abiding and indestructible blessedness of sinful man.

But while the multitude were cherishing false ideas and expectations about his kingdom, many were cherishing false ideas and fears about Christ himself that equally required to be removed. They had noticed in his teaching the absence of any reference to many of those religious services that they so punctiliously performed, some disregard of them in his own practice and in that of his disciples. This man, they began to say, is an enemy to Moses. He is aiming at nothing short of a subversion of the old, the heaven-given law. Jesus must proclaim how untrue the accusation was. "Think not," he said, "that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

But in what did the true fulfillment of the

Mosaic law consist? It was a vast and complicated code, embracing a body of laws for a peculiar people, existing at a particular period, and organized for a special purpose; subject, therefore, to all the limitations and exhibiting all the adaptations to existing circumstances which, in proportion to the wisdom with which it is framed, all such legislation must display. It had in it commands of a purely ethical and religious character, conveyed in more general and abstract forms; and it had in it a large apparatus of positive enactments and ordinances chiefly meant to symbolize the truths and facts of the Christian dispensation. It was not throughout an expression of God's absolute will, perfect, immutable, meant to be of permanent and universal obligation. Part of it, perfectly adapted to its design, was inherently imperfect; part of it as necessarily transitory. When the time came that the Jewish nation should either cease to exist or cease to have its old functions to discharge, and when all its types and ceremonies had their true meaning expressed and their ends accomplished—then out of this complicated law there would come to be extracted that which was absolutely perfect and universally obligatory. Jesus knew

that at his advent that time had come, and assuming the very place and exercising the very prerogative of the Divine Legislator of the Jews, he begins in this Sermon on the Mount to execute this task. He treats the old Jewish practice of divorce as imperfect, being adapted to a single nation at a particular stage of its moral training, and lays down the original and perfect law of the marriage relationship. In like manner he deals with the *lex talionis*—the rule of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, and with the law and custom as to oaths. But it is especially in his treatment of those commandments about whose permanent obligation there was and could be no doubt, that the novelty and value of his teaching displayed itself. These were negative and prohibitory in their form. Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not commit adultery, etc. etc. They had been looked at in the letter rather than in the spirit. They had been regarded simply as prohibitions of certain outward acts or crimes. Abstinence from the forbidden deeds had been taken as a keeping of the Divine commands. Obedience had thus come to be looked upon as a thing of outward constraint or mechanical conformity, its merit lying in the force of the

constraint, the exactness of the conformity. It was thus that the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees consisted mainly in a stiff and formal adherence to the letter of the precept, to the neglect often, and sometimes to the contradiction of its spirit. This fatal error Christ exposes, taking up commandment after commandment, unfolding the spirituality and extent of the requirement, showing how it reached not simply or mainly to the regulation of the outward conduct, but primarily and above all things to the state of the heart; that murder lay in embryo in an angry feeling, that adultery lurked in a licentious look, that it was not alone when the name of God was vainly used that irreverence might be exhibited and profane swearing practised, that the old Jewish rule of retaliation was no rule for the regulation of the affections or the guidance of the conduct in a pure and perfect state, that from the heart every sentiment of malice or revenge must be banished, and in the conduct the evil done to us by another remain unresented, unavenged, the enemy to be loved, the persecutor to be prayed for; and all this done that we might be merciful as our Father that is in heaven is merciful, perfect as he is perfect,

children of him who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth his rain on the just and on the unjust.

This end and aim of being like to, of being imitators of God, was one too pure, too high, too holy to suffer corruption and the worm to enter into it by admixture with the selfish and ignoble motive of courting human approval, winning human applause. Too much of the almsgiving and the fasting and the praying that he saw practised around him was done to be seen of men, prompted by no other motive, was nothing but hypocrisy, utterly offensive to his Father in heaven. Concealed and unostentatious let the givings and the fastings be, short and simple and secret the prayers of those who would be his disciples and true children of his Father, whom seeing in secret he would in due time openly reward.

Let all be done as unto him with an undivided allegiance, for no man can serve two masters ; and with an unbounded trust, for, having such a Father, why should there be any over-carefulness for earthly things—those things that He knows we have need of, or any undue concern about a future which is not ours but his? Why so anxious about food and raiment? It

is God who sustains the life of the body ; you must trust him for that—the greater thing ; then why distrust him for the less ? Behold the fowls of the air ; consider the lilies of the field ; look at the grass that grows beneath your feet. Not theirs, as yours, the capacity for trust and toil and foresight. A worthless fleeting existence theirs as compared with yours ; yet see how they are not only cared for but lavishly adorned. “Take, therefore, no thought for the morrow ; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness ; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

Conscious of your own far shortcomings from that perfect confidence you should cherish—that constant service you should be rendering, be not severe in criticising or condemning others. Judge not that ye be not judged. “Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, and considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye ? Thou hypocrite ; first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.”

It may be very difficult to be all, to do all that I am now telling you you ought to be and to do ; but is there not an open and effectual way for having every felt spiritual want relieved ? “ Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.” “ Ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him ?”

Drawing from the exhaustless fountain of grace and strength that in him is opened to you, fear not to adopt this as the one comprehensive rule of your whole bearing and conduct toward others. “ All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them : for this is the law and the prophets.”

Before the days of Christ there was a great Jewish teacher, Hillel. An inquirer once came to him asking the strange question : “ Can you teach one the whole law during the time that I am able to stand on one foot ?” “ Yes,” said Hillel, “ it is contained in this one rule : Whatsoever ye would not wish that your neighbor should do to you, do it *not* to him.” This and other sayings of preceding Rabbis have been

quoted with a view of detracting somewhat from the originality of the moral teaching of Christ. Yet even here, while the resemblance between the lessons taught is so marked, one grand difference may be discerned—a difference that runs through so large a part of the Saviour's precepts as compared with those of all other moral legislators. He translates the negative into the positive. With him it is not—be not, do not; but, be and do. In a few instances are any specific rules of conduct laid down. To plant the right spirit and motive in the heart, out of which all true morality proceeds, is the great object He aims at. Look up to God, he says to us, as indeed your Father—ever living, ever loving, patiently bearing with you, largely providing for you, willing to forgive you. Walk humbly, meekly, trustingly before him. Commit your way to him, cast all your care on him, seek all your supplies from him, render all your returns to him. Look upon all your fellow-men as children of the same father, members of the same family. Love each other, and live together as brethren, bearing yourselves towards all around you patiently, forgivingly, generously, hopefully. The gate thus opened is strait, the way is narrow,

but it is the only one that leadeth unto life. And finally, remember that it is practice, not profession, that can alone conduct you along the path to the throne in heaven. Hear then, and do, that ye may be like the wise man who built his house upon a rock, "and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock."

Such is a rapid, imperfect sketch of the Sermon on the Mount, regarded mainly from a historical point of view, in its bearings upon the audience to which it was originally addressed. The people who first heard it, we are told, were astonished at its doctrine. Well they might. It was so different from what they had been accustomed to. No labored argument, no profound discussion, no doubtful disputation, no nice distinctions, no scheme of doctrines formally and elaborately propounded, no exact routine of religious services prescribed. It dealt with the simplest, plainest moral and religious truths and duties ; and did this in the simplest, plainest manner ;—directly, familiarly, colloquially—a freshness about it like that of the morning breeze which played over the mountain-side. The thing, however, that seems

to have struck the listeners most was the calm, unhesitating, authoritative tone in which the whole was uttered. "They were astonished at his doctrine : for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes." Here is One who comes forth from none of the great schools,—who has sat at the feet of none of the great masters,—who uses no book language,—who appeals to no authority but his own—a young untaught Nazarene ; and yet he takes it upon him to pronounce with the utmost confidence as to who the truly blessed are, and reckons among them those who were to be railed at and persecuted for his sake. Here is One who does not shrink from taking into his hands the law and the prophets, acting not simply as their expositor—the clearer of them from all false traditional interpretations. He is bold enough to say that he came to fulfill them ; in one remarkable instance, at least—that of the law which permitted divorce—speaking as the original lawgiver was alone entitled to do, declaring that the time for this permission had now ceased, and that henceforth such divorces as Moses had tolerated were not to be allowed. Here is One who speaks of God as one who fully knew, and had a right

to declare, how his children were to act so as to please him ; whom he would forgive, whom he would reward, upon whom he would bestow his gifts. Here is One who, though seated on that Galilean mountain, with nothing to distinguish him from the humble fishermen around him, speaks of a day on which he should be seated on the throne of universal judgment, to whom many should say, “ Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?”—to whom he was to reply, “ I never knew you : depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

In consequence of the simplicity, purity, and elevation of the moral precepts which it contains, and still more, perhaps, because of none of the peculiar doctrines as to the person, character, office, and work of Christ as the Mediator being found in it, this Sermon on the Mount has been greedily seized upon and highly extolled by many as the true epitome of Christianity—as Christ’s own gospel, coming from his own lips. But it is far less difficult for us to discern the reasons why the truths of the incarnation and the propitiatory sacrifice were not at this time and to that audience alluded to or

dwelt upon by Jesus, than it is for any who would reduce him to the level of a mere moral legislator to account for the position which, even when enunciating the simplest moral precepts, he assumed—for the tone of authority in which he speaks. Dimly, indeed, through this Sermon on the Mount does the Jesus of the Cross appear, but the Jesus of the Throne is here, and once that we have learned from other after-teachings of himself and his Apostles to know, and love, and trust in him as our great High Priest, who has bought us with his blood, it will be the habit and delight of every true and faithful follower of his to take up and dwell upon that wonderful discourse, in which, more clearly and fully than in any other words of human speech, the very spirit and essence of a humble child-like faith in God, and the lofty ideal of a perfect, a heavenly morality, is unfolded and enforced.

V.

THE RAISING OF THE WIDOW'S SON AND THE RULER'S DAUGHTER.*

THE multitude that listened to the Sermon on the Mount followed Jesus from the hill-side into Capernaum, thronging round the house into which he entered, and pressing their sick so urgently on his notice that he "could not so much as eat bread." A mode of life like this,—out all night upon the mountain top, teaching, walking, working all day long without food or rest,—so affected the minds of his immediate relatives when they heard of it that they "went out to lay hold of him, for they said, He is beside himself." Failing in their endeavors, they left him to pursue his eccentric course.

It was in the course of the busy day which followed the delivery of the Sermon on the Mount that the centurion's servant was healed,

* Luke vii. 11-17 ; viii. 41-56 ; Matt. ix. 18-26 ; Mark v. 22-43.

and the opportunity was thereby given to Jesus to hold up to the eyes of the people an example of such faith as he had not found—no, not in Israel. On the following day he left Capernaum. “Many of his disciples and much people” went with him. They had a long day’s walk over the hills of Galilee, skirting the base of Tabor, and descending into the valley of Esdraelon. The sun was sinking in the west, away behind the ridge of Carmel, and was gilding with his evening beams the slopes of little Hermon, as Jesus and the band which followed him approached the village of Nain. This village is now a confused heap of the rudest Syrian huts, unenclosed, with no ruins of ancient buildings, nor any antiquities around, save the tombs in the rock upon the hill-side, where for ages they have buried the dead. And yet it stands next to Nazareth and Bethlehem and Bethany in the sacred interest attached to it. We are so sure of its identity, it is so small, so isolated, having nothing but the one wonderful incident to mark its history, that the Saviour’s living presence was almost as vividly realized by us when entering it as when we sat by the side of Jacob’s well. We stood at the end of the village which looks northward towards Galilee,

and tried to recall the scene. Jesus and his train of followers have crossed the plain, and are drawing near to the village. Another company moves slowly and sadly out of its gate and meets them. It is a funeral procession ; a large one, for all the villagers have come forth, but there is no mark or token that it is the funeral of one who had been rich or in any way distinguished. The bier is of the plainest, and there follows it as chief mourner a solitary woman, clad in humblest guise. Jesus has none beside him, as he stops and looks, to tell him who this woman is—who the dead for whom she mourns. He does not need the information ; he knows her history ; he knows her grief better than any inhabitant of Nain. To his eye it is a becoming and beautiful thing that grief like hers should have such homage paid to it, should have drawn the whole village out after her by the pure force of sympathy. Her claim, indeed, upon that sympathy is strong. This is not the first bier she has followed. She had wept for another before she wept for him whom they are now carrying to the grave. She is a widow—weeping now behind the bier of her only son. Bereft of every earthly stay she walks, a picture of perfect desolation.

“And when the Lord saw her he had compassion on her.” As soon as his eye rests on her his heart fills full of pity. Was this the first funeral he had ever met in the wayside along with his disciples? Was this the first mourner he had ever noticed go weeping thus behind the dead? It may not have been so ; yet never perhaps before had he seen a poor lone widowed mother shed such bitter tears over the death of an only son. The sight moves him at least to do what he had never done before. He goes up to the woman, and says to her “ *Weep not.*” Wrapped up in her consuming grief, how surprised she must have been at being accosted in such a way at such a time. Does this stranger mean to mock her, to deal rudely with her in her grief? In any other she might have been ready to repel and resent the unseasonable intrusion—the strange, unreasonable speech ; but there is something in the loving, pitying eye that looks at her as she glances at him timidly through her tears—something of hope, of promise, of assurance in the gentle yet authoritative tones of his voice that quenches all disposition to repel or resent. But why does Christ first say to her—Weep not? Does he not know what he is about to

do? Does he not know that within a few minutes that will be done by him which, without any bidding on his part, will dry up all her tears? He does; but he cannot go forward to his great act without yielding to the impulse of pity; dropping into the ear of the mourner—not as a cold word of command, fitted only to give needless pain, but as a spontaneous expression of his warm personal compassion—the words, “Weep not.” Such a preface to the miracle speaks to us as plainly of the tenderness of Christ’s sympathy as the miracle itself proclaims the infinitude of his power.

“And he came and touched the bier, and they that bore him stood still.” And all stand as still as the bearers; the two groups, the one from Capernaum and the other from Nain, lost in wonder as to what is to happen next. All eyes turn upon Jesus. His turn upon the bier. The silence is broken by the simple majestic words, “Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.” The young man rises, looks about with wonder, begins to speak. Jesus takes him by the hand, lifts him from the bier, delivers him to his mother. The deed of mercy is done, and nothing more is told, but that a great fear came upon all. “And they glorified God, say-

ing, That a great prophet is risen up among us ; and, That God hath visited his people. And this rumor of him went forth throughout all Judea, and throughout all the region round about."

It was a few days or weeks before or after this incident (for the date is uncertain) that one of the rulers of the synagogue at Capernaum, Jairus by name, came to Jesus as he sat at meat in the house of Levi, and "cast himself at his feet, and worshipped him, and besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death ; come and lay thy hands upon her, that she may be healed, and she shall live." Jesus arose at once and went with Jairus ; so did his disciples, and so did much people ; the very promptness of Christ's compliance with the ruler's request stimulating their curiosity.

The distance could not have been great from the house of Levi to that of Jairus, and might speedily have been traversed, but the crowd that thronged around Jesus by the way somewhat impeded the movement. It gave, however, to one poor woman the opportunity she had long been seeking. Twelve long years she had been a sufferer, her illness one that made

her very touch pollution. All she had she had spent upon physicians. It seemed rather to have aggravated her complaint. Seeing or hearing about Jesus, a belief in the healing virtue that lay in him had taken possession of her mind. Her timidity, her sense of shame, kept her from going openly to him, telling him of her malady, and asking him to exert his power on her behalf. But if she could in any way unseen get at him, if she could but touch his clothes, she felt that she should be made whole. And now he goes through this great crowd. It is the very occasion she has been seeking for, and she seizes it : gets behind him, presses through the people, and touches the hem of his outer garment. She is instantly healed, but as instantly arrested. The touch has scarce been given, the healing scarce effected, when Jesus turns round and says, "Who touched my clothes? They all deny the deed. Peter expostulates with his Master. "The multitude," he says, "throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? Jesus knows as well as Peter that many had been near enough for their and his garments to have come into contact ; but he knows, too, as Peter knew not, that there had been a touch with a distinct, deliberate pur-

pose, altogether different from that of a mere random contact, a touch that had drawn virtue out of him. Who gave it? His eye looked round to see, is already resting on the woman, who, seeing that she is not hid, fearing and trembling, yet glad and grateful, throws herself on her knees before him, and the better of all her womanly feelings, declares unto him "before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately."

Had Jesus been displeased at being touched? Had he grudged in any way that the virtue had in such a way been extracted? Was it to detect and rebuke a culprit that he had challenged the multitude? No: it was because he knew how very strong was this woman's faith,—a faith sufficient to draw out at once in fullest measure the healing efficacy, and yet a faith that had in it a superstitious element, the fancy that in some magical mysterious way contact of any kind established between her and Christ would cure her. If he allowed her to go away undetected, the healing filched, as it were, unconsciously from the healer, this fancy might be confirmed, the superstitious element in her faith enhanced. Therefore it was that he would not suffer the secrecy. He would meet

and answer the faith which under the heavy pressure and in despair of all other help had thrown itself somewhat blindly yet confidingly upon his aid. But he will not allow her to depart without letting her know how wrong and how needless it had been in her to attempt concealment, without letting her and all around her know what was the kind of touch that she had given which had established the right connection between her and him, and opened the way for the remedy reaching the disease. "And he said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort ; thy faith hath made thee whole, go in peace."

There is not one of all our Saviour's many miracles of healing fuller of comfort and encouragement. For if his mode of dealing with our spiritual diseases be shadowed out in the modes of the bodily cures that he effected, whenever we grow sad or despondent as we think how much of fear, or shame, or error, or weakness, or superstition mingles with the faith we cherish, then let us remember that if only the depth and inveteracy of the spiritual disease be felt, if with or without a long trial of them we have been led to despair of all other physicians of the soul, and to look alone to

Jesus Christ, he who accepted this woman's faith with all its weakening and defiling ingredients, will not cast us off. A timid, trembling touch of him, be it only the touch of humility and trust, will still bring forth that healing virtue which wraps itself up in no guarded seclusion, but delights to pour itself freely out into every open and empty receptacle that is brought to it.

The stoppage by the way, however brief, must have been somewhat trying to Jairus, but he showed no impatience. There was a short delay, but with it a new proof of Christ's power well fitted to fortify his faith. But just as the healed woman is sent away, the messenger arrives, who says, "Thy daughter is dead, why troublest thou the Master any further? The words were perhaps not meant for the ear of Christ, yet it caught them up, and the moment it did so, knowing and feeling to what a strain the faith of Jairus was exposed, and how much he needed to be assured and comforted, "as soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith to the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe." Jairus hears the reassuring words, and, heedless of the suggestion made, follows Jesus as before.

At last the house of the dead is reached. Jesus suffers none of his followers to enter with him save Peter, James, and John, the three privileged apostles who were with him on the mount of his transfiguration and in the garden of his agony, the three chosen witnesses of the highest exercise of his power, the fullest display of his glory, the greatest depth of his sorrow. The first apartment of the ruler's house is occupied with those who fill it with a perfect tumult of bemoaning sounds. It was the custom to hire such mourners on these occasions,—the more numerous, the more vehement, the higher the station of the family. The outward demonstration of grief that they here make is excessive, but there is no heart in all the sound and show, no true utterance of any real sorrow. As at discord at once with his own feeling and with his formed purpose, Jesus rebukes the wailers, and says to them, "Give place ; why make ye this ado ? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth." Not dead ? Can they, the hired officials, not tell the difference between sleep and death ? Who is he that speaks to them so slightly, so authoritatively taking it on him, stranger though he be, to stop their lamentations ? They "laugh him to scorn : " this real laughter still more incongruous

with his presence and his purpose than the feigned grief. With Jairus to second him, Jesus puts all the people out, takes "the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying." He takes the dead child by the hand, simply says, *Talitha cumi*—damsel arise! and she rises, weak as from a bed of illness, yet with all the seeds of the mortal malady which had laid her low banished from her frame. Having directed that some food should be given her, Jesus straitly charged the parents that they should tell no man; an injunction, let us believe, that they did their best to keep, and yet St. Matthew tells us "the fame thereof went abroad into all that land."

It is difficult to understand why it was that Jesus laid such a stringent injunction of secrecy upon the parents in this instance. Had the widow's son not been raised from the dead about the same time, and in circumstances of the utmost publicity, we might have imagined that there was a desire on the part of Christ to throw, for a time at least, a veil over this particular form of the manifestation of his power. But though that other miracle had not been wrought, had this one stood alone, how could

it be hidden? There were too many that had seen the damsel die, or mourned over her when dead, to allow of any concealment. As we think of the difficulty, we might almost say impossibility of such concealment, the thought occurs (and other instances in which the same command was given by Christ may in the same way be explained) that it was not so much with any desire or intention to secure secrecy that the order was issued, as to prevent those who had the closest personal interest in the miracle being the first or the loudest in noising it abroad.

There does not seem to have been any previous acquaintance between Christ and the widow of Nain. It may be doubted whether she had ever seen Jesus till she met him as she was going out to bury her son. We do not read of Jesus ever being in Nain but on that one occasion. It lay beyond the line of those circuits of Galilee which he was in the habit of making. We are not surprised, therefore, at noticing that his interference there was voluntary, without any solicitation or hope entertained beforehand on the part of the mourner. It was different with Jairus at Capernaum. He was a well-known man, living in the town

which Jesus had chosen as his headquarters in Galilee. In all likelihood he was one of the rulers of the Jews who formed the deputation that a short time before had waited on Jesus to ask his aid on behalf of the Roman centurion. It was quite natural that, when his "one only daughter" lay a-dying, he should apply on her account to Christ. But there may have been in his character and connection something of which we are ignorant, which made it undesirable that he should be forward in proclaiming what had happened in his house.

It was a case of recovery from the dead, about which there might be some cavilling. The child could have been but a short time dead ; long enough, indeed, to establish the certainty of the event, yet not so long as to hinder any one from saying that it was literally and not figuratively true, "She is not dead, but sleepeth." In this respect we notice a difference, a progression in the three instances of raising from the dead recorded by the Evangelists—that of Jairus's daughter, of the widow's son, and of Lazarus. It is not distinctly said to be so ; but we presume that these were the only three cases in which the dead were restored to life by Christ. The one

was soon after death, the other immediately before burial, the third after the dead man had lain four days in the grave—the variety of the period after death at which the restoration was in each case effected not, perhaps, without a purpose. For these three great miracles stand, in one respect, at the head of all our Lord's works of wonder. They were the highest instances of the forth-putting of his divine almighty power. With respect to many of his other works, questions might be raised as to the nature or extent of the power required for their performance, but none as to these. Life in all its forms, from the highest to the lowest, is that mysterious thing which, when once destroyed, none but the Creator—the great Life-giver—can restore. Were a dead man actually revived before our eyes, we could not doubt that the power of the Omnipotent had gone forth to do it. In no case did Jesus Christ so conspicuously and undoubtedly show himself to be clothed with that power as when he raised the dead. The power, indeed by which he wrought such miracles might not have been naturally his own. It might have been a delegated power, given him for the time, not permanently belonging to him. He

might have raised the dead as Elijah raised the son of the widow at Zarephath, as Elisha did the son of the Shunamite. Had it been so, we should have had some evidence thereof—some appeal on the part of the mere human agent to the great Being whose power was for the moment lent and exercised. It was with trouble and with pain, after much and earnest prayer, that Elijah and Elisha, the only raisers of the dead in all the preceding ages, had succeeded. No one who saw or heard them could have imagined that they claimed any natural or inherent power of their own over the dead to call them back to life. They would themselves have counted it as the greatest insult to Jehovah to do so. How is it in this respect with Jesus Christ? Stand beside him as he calls the dead to life. Look at the manner of his acting, listen to the words that he employs. Is it as a servant, the delegate of another, that he speaks and acts? Is it with any consciousness on his part, felt or exhibited, that he was rising above the level at which he ordinarily stood, that he was then doing something which he had been specially commissioned and supernaturally qualified to accomplish? Surely there is nothing more remarkable about these raisings from the dead

by Jesus Christ than the simple, easy, unostentatious way in which they were effected. "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise"—"Maid, arise"—"Lazarus, come forth." He speaks thus to the dead, and they hear and live. It is in the style of him who said, Let there be light, and there was light. It is the Lord of the living and of the dead whose voice penetrates the unseen world, and summons the departed spirit to resume its mortal tenement.

But if, as to the power he wields, Jesus never presents himself to our eye in a diviner, never does he show himself in a more human aspect than in these raisings from the dead. Can we overlook the fact that they were those of one only son of a widowed mother, the only daughter, if not the only child, of two fond parents, the only brother of two affectionate sisters--of those whose loss in their respective homesteads would be so deeply felt, of those whose restoration quickened so acute a grief into such an ecstatic joy? And in each case there was something quite singular in the tenderness of our Lord's conduct towards the mourners. He knew beforehand how speedily the anxiety that he witnessed would be relieved, all the sorrow chased away; but the "weep not" to the

mother before he touched the bier, the "fear not, only believe," to the agitated father, the tears that fell before the grave of Lazarus, what a testimony do they bear to the exquisite susceptibility of the Saviour's spirit—to the quickness, the fullness, the liveliness of his sympathy with human grief. It is even then, when he is most divine, that he is most human—when he lifts himself the highest above our level that he links himself the closest to us as a true brother of our humanity. Such power to help, such readiness and capacity to sympathize, meet but in one Being.

Many passages of the New Testament might be quoted which assign it as one of the reasons of the Incarnation that there might be such a Being, one compassed about with infirmities, one touched with a fellow-feeling with our infirmities, one tempted in all things like as we are, a merciful as well as a faithful, a compassionate as well as an all-powerful, all-prevalent High Priest over the House of God. The great Son of God, when he stooped to become a man, did not become thereby more merciful, more kind, more compassionate than he had been; yet are we not warranted to believe that a human element was introduced and infused

into them which otherwise the mercy, kindness, compassion should not have possessed? If the Manhood was a gainer by bringing it into close, mysterious union with the Divinity, was there no gain to the Divinity by the Incarnation?—not, of course, a gain absolutely, not a gain as to any original, essential faculty or attribute of the Supreme, but a gain as to the bringing of the Divine Being into closer and more sympathetic fellowship with man? We all know how difficult it is, whatever be the natural capacity and largeness of our pity, to sympathize fully and tenderly with a kind of trial we have never felt. Those who have never wept over any dead they loved, can they enter into the grief of the bereaved? And how could we, but by the Incarnation, have had one who could enter as Jesus can into all our sorrows?

Why was such a sympathy as his provided for us, but that as sinners as well as sufferers we might cast ourselves upon it for support? Jesus is the great raiser of human souls as well as of human bodies. He quickeneth whom he will. The hour has come when all that are in the grave of sin, of spiritual death, may hear his voice. That voice is sounding all around us as in the ears of the dead. Awake, it says

to each of us—awake, thou that sleepest, arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee life. Let us awake, and with life new-given turn to the Life-giver; rejoicing to know that as tenderly as he handed her new-raised son to the widow of Nain, as tenderly as he ordered the food to be given to the little daughter of Jairus, so tenderly will he watch over the first stages of our spiritual being, and that as fully as the griefs of widowed mother and weeping parents were shared in of old by Him in Galilee, so fully will he share in all the griefs of our earthly history, till he takes us to the land where his own gracious hand shall wipe off the tears from every eye, and we shall no more need another to weep with us in our sorrows.

VI.

THE EMBASSY OF THE BAPTIST—THE GREAT INVITATION.*

OUR Lord's public ministry in Galilee began at the time that John had been cast into prison, and had now continued for more than half a year. There was much in this ministry which those disciples of the Baptist who kept aloof from Jesus could not comprehend. There was the entire absence of that ascetic rigor and stern denunciation of all iniquity, by which their Master's character and teaching had been distinguished. There were no fastings, no prescribed repeated prayers, there was the call of a publican to be an apostle, there was the eating and drinking with publicans and sinners. All this appeared to them not only different from, but inconsistent

* Matt. xi.

with, the idea of that kingdom, of whose advent their Master had announced himself as the herald. Some of them carried their doubts and difficulties to John himself in the prison. Hearing from them of the works of Christ, the Baptist sent two of their number to Jesus, and bade them put to him the question, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" As coming from John himself, and meant for his personal satisfaction, the question certainly would imply that some temporary misgiving had crept into the Baptist's mind. It is somewhat difficult to believe, after the revelations made to him, after what he had heard and seen at the baptism, after his own repeated public proclamations of it, that his faith in the Messiahship of Jesus had been shaken. His long and unexpected imprisonment, however, must have severely tried his faith. To such a man, from infancy a child of the desert, who had roamed with such free footstep through the wilderness of Engedi, who, when the time came for his manifestation to Israel, had but exchanged the freedom of his mountain solitudes for those liberties of speech and action he took with his fellow-countrymen. the months of his imprisonment must have

moved slowly and drearily along, turning even his strength into weakness.

The chilly damp of being hurried unexpectedly from Herod's presence and his former open active life into the cheerless, idle solitude of the prison, fell all the chillier upon his heart on his coming to know that Jesus had been apprised of his imprisonment, and that yet no message of sympathy had been sent, that no movement for his deliverance was made. His notions of the coming kingdom may not have been different from those entertained at the time by the apostles and other followers of Christ. Perhaps he fancied that at the setting-up of this kingdom all injustice, and oppression, and spiritual wickedness in high places was to be done away, the axe to be laid at their root, the fan to be so used as thoroughly to purge the threshing-floor. Perhaps, in rebuking Herod as he did, he thought that it was but a first blow dealt at that which the mightier than he who was to come after him was wholly to destroy. And when, instead of his expectations being fulfilled, he was left unvisited, uncheered, unhelped; and he heard of the course which Jesus was pursuing, gathering crowds indeed around him, but carefully abstaining from announcing himself

as the Messiah, or doing anything towards the erection of a new kingdom,—in some season of disquietude and despondency, perplexed and a little impatient, sharing their feelings, and in the hope of at once relieving their doubts and removing his own misgivings, he sent two of his disciples to put to him a question which might be the means of drawing from Jesus a public declaration of his Messiahship, and of inducing him openly to inaugurate the new kingdom.*

The messengers arrived and delivered their message at a very opportune conjuncture. “In the same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight.”† Jesus kept John’s messengers for a season near him instead of answering them, going on with his healing work. He then turned to them and said, “Go your way, and tell John what things ye have

* Many think that it was for the sake of his disciples, and for their sakes alone, that the Baptist sent them on this errand, not that he had any doubts himself, but he knew they had. It is altogether likely that he had some regard to their establishment in a true faith in Christ. The question, however, put into their lips, comes too directly from himself, and the answer is directed too plainly and pointedly to him, to allow us to shut out the idea of personal relief and satisfaction being contemplated.

† Luke vii. 21.

seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the Gospel is preached." It is not simply to the miracles as displays of superhuman power that Jesus appeals; it is to their kind and character, as peculiarly and prophetically Messianic.

Jesus had hitherto refrained from assuming the title of the Messiah, or announcing himself as such. John by his messengers urges him to do so. Christ contents himself with simply pointing to such works done by him as the Baptist could not fail to recognize as a fulfillment of those prophecies of Isaiah, in which the days and doings of the Messiah were described. Nor can we fail to notice that, side by side with the greatest of the miracles, reserved as the closing crowning testimony to the Messiahship, is the fact that to the poor the Gospel was preached; to the poor as well as the rich, to no favored people, class, or section of mankind, to all in that universal character which all sustain as sinful, responsible, immortal. The words that Jesus added, "And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me," may have carried with them a special allusion to the Baptist, while proclaiming the

blessedness of the man who was not offended at the patience and gentleness of Jesus, his readiness to wait and to suffer, to invite and encourage, rather than to denounce and to punish.

Having given them what seemed a sufficient answer, Jesus sent John's messengers away. He had something more, however, to say to the people that was not for the Baptist's ear; which must not be said till the messengers were gone. What they had just seen and heard was fitted to create an unfavorable impression, as if the faith, or fortitude, or patience of John had utterly given way. Eager to shield the character of his forerunner, Jesus turned to the multitude and said to them concerning John, "What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?" a man bowing and bending as the reed does before every passing breeze, a man fickle of purpose, changeable in faith, believing at Bethabara, disbelieving now at Machærus? Not such a man is John; rock-like, not reed-like—such as he was in the wilderness, such is he in Herod's keep. "What went ye out to see? A man clothed in soft raiment?" caring for the comforts and luxuries of life, or a man

who, all negligent as he had been of these before, feels now the hair-cloth to be too hard a garment, and would fain exchange it for a softer one? Not such a man is John. The wearers and lovers of soft raiment you will find in palaces, not in prisons. John cares as little for such raiment now as when of his own free will he chose the hair-cloth as his garment. "But what went ye out to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet." The only one among all the prophets whose course and offices were themselves the subjects of prophecy; whose birth, like that of his Great Master, an angel was commissioned to announce; his predecessors seeing but from afar across the breadth of intervening centuries, he, the friend of the bridegroom, standing by the bridegroom's side, his office such towards Christ as to elevate him to a height above any ever reached before, yet this kind of greatness, one springing from position and office, as local, external, temporary, not once to be mentioned alongside of that other kind of greatness which is moral, spiritual, intrinsic, eternal. "For this is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto

you, Among them that are born of woman there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist ; notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

More than one public testimony had been borne by John to Jesus. Jesus answers these by the witness he thus bears to John. But as he thinks of himself in conjunction with the Baptist, the strange and inconsistent treatment that they respectively had met with from the men of that generation presents itself to his thoughts.* It is but seldom that anything like criticism or complaint touching those around him comes from the lips of Jesus. All the more interesting is the glance that he here casts, the judgment that he here pronounces, upon the men of his own age and nation. Addressed by two different voices, speaking in two different tones, they had turned a deaf ear to both. The rigor of the law came to them in the message of the Baptist ; they took offence at it. The gentleness and love of the Gospel came to them in the message of Jesus ; they took equal offence at it ; justifying in either case their conduct by fixing on something in the charac-

* Matt. xi. 16-19.

ter or lives of each of the two messengers which they turned into matter of complaint and accusation ; guilty of great unfairness in doing so, exhibiting the grossest inconsistency, charging opposite excesses upon John and upon Jesus, saying of the one that he was too austere and ascetic, that he had a devil—saying of the other that he was too free and social, that he was a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, the friend of publicans and sinners. Had it been any other two of Heaven's chosen messengers that they had to deal with, they might have had less difficulty in fixing on some irregularity or eccentricity of conduct out of which to fashion the shelter they sought to construct. But that even with them they tried this expedient, and imagined that they had succeeded, only shows to what lengths that principle or tendency of our nature will go which seeks to mix up the claims of religion with the character of its advocates.

But now the Saviour's thoughts pass onward from the contemplation of that folly and inconsistency which a familiar similitude borrowed from the market-place may expose, to dwell more profoundly upon the conduct of those cities wherein most of his mighty works were

done. In endeavoring to follow and fathom from this point onwards the train of our Lord's reflections, as recorded by the Evangelist, we enter a region remote and very elevated. "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." "And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell; for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day." Who is he who announces so confidently what certain communities would have done had they been placed in other circumstances than those in which they actually stood, and what altered outward destiny would have followed the different course pursued! "It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon and for the land of Sodom at the day of judgment than for you." Who is he who anticipates the verdicts of eternity, pronouncing so confidently upon the greater and the lesser guilt, fore-announcing the lighter and the heavier doom?

But now, before the eye of the man Christ Jesus, there spreads out a section of the great

mystery that hangs over this world's spiritual history. Here are men—these inhabitants of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum—involved in all the greater guilt, incurring all the heavier doom, in consequence of the presence of Jesus in the midst of them. There were men—those inhabitants of Sodom, and Tyre, and Sidon, who, had they lived in an after-age and enjoyed the privileges bestowed upon the others, would have repented and shared in all the blessings of the heavenly kingdom. How many questions, as we stand in front of acts like these, press upon our thoughts and rise to our trembling lips—questions touching the principles and procedure of the Divine government as affecting the future and eternal destinies of our race—questions we cannot answer, that it pains and perplexes us to the uttermost even to entertain? It is in this very region that there comes one of the greatest trials of our faith. Was there no trial of the like kind for the man Christ Jesus, as he, too, stood gazing down into these depths? In what way or to what extent the human spirit of our Lord lay open to that burden and pressure which a contemplation of the sins and sufferings here and hereafter of so many of our fellow-creatures brings down upon every

thoughtful spirit that has any of the tenderness of humanity in it, it is not for us to determine. But that he who was tempted in all things like as we are did at this time feel something of this burden and pressure, seems clear from the attitude into which he immediately throws himself. "At that time"—when thought was hovering over this dark and awful region—Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven. Some light has broken in upon that darkness from above, drawing his eyes upwards to its source. Some voice from above has spoken, that comes, as his own came upon the troubled waters of the lake, to still the inward agitation of his thoughts. "Jesus answered and said, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth!" Infinitely wise, infinitely merciful, infinitely loving Father, thou art Lord of heaven and earth. The past has all been ordered—the future will be all arranged by thee, and in thy character and purposes and providence over all as at once the Father and the Judge, the solution lies of all that to created eyes may seem obscure. "I thank thee . . . that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Why are the things that belong to their eternal peace hidden from some and

revealed to others, hidden from so many, revealed to comparatively so few? One beam of light falls upon the darkness here, and for it the thanks are given.

It is not an arbitrary distinction, drawn by a capricious hand that loves to show its power. The fate of Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon was not one that it was impossible for them to have evaded, that nothing could have turned aside. They might have repented, and had they repented the ruin had not come. A thick cloud, charged with bolts of vengeance, hung over Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum because of their unbelief. All over the land it was but one of a family, or two of a city, who had welcomed the Saviour and his message. The right interpretation of all this was not given by saying that it was by a divine decree that had no regard to the character and conduct of each, that the eyes of some were blinded and the eyes of others opened to the heavenly light. It was from the wise and prudent, who thought themselves so much wiser or better than others, whose pride it was that blinded them, that the Gospel was hidden. It was to the babes, to the humble, the meek, the teachable, that it had been revealed. And it is not so much for the hiding it

from the one as for the revealing it to the other that Jesus here gave thanks. On two after occasions of his life he had each of the two alternatives—the hiding and the revealing, separately and exclusively before him, and the difference of the emotions felt and expressed by him marked the difference of their effects upon his mind and heart. Would we know what impression the revealing made, let us plant ourselves by his side as the seventy return from their brief but successful mission, and tell him of the results ; when, without a shadow on his joy, he rejoices in spirit, and repeats in words the very thanksgiving that he now offered. Would we know what impression the hiding made, let us plant ourselves beside him as he beheld the city and wept over it, exclaiming, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ! if thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace ! but now they are hid from thine eyes.”

But is it a full solution of the mystery that those left in darkness have themselves, by their willfulness, and pride, and carnality, created a medium through which the heavenly light cannot pass ? Why is it, if the spirits of all men are equally and absolutely beneath the control

of the Creator, that any are suffered to remain in such condition? There is no answer to such a question, for, take up the great enigma of the doings of God and the destinies of man at what end you may, approach it from what quarter you please, adopt whatever method of solution you may prefer, make your way through the difficulties that beset you as far as you can, sooner or later you reach the point where explanation fails, and where there is nothing left for us but to join with him who said, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight."

The occasion now before us may have been the first in which Jesus was seen and heard in the act of prayer. The stopping of the current of his address to them by the offering up of a short and solemn thanksgiving to his Father in heaven must have made a deep impression on the multitude. It was singularly fitted to excite wonder and awe, and to lead them to inquire what the peculiar relationship was in which Jesus stood to the Great Being whom he so addressed. Was it not as one reading their thoughts and graciously condescending to unfold so much of the mystery of his Sonship to the Father, that Jesus went on to say, "All things are delivered unto me of

my Father : and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father. . . . and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." The Baptist, in his closing testimony to Jesus, had declared, "the Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand."

Jesus now takes up and appropriates this testimony. With special reference, we may believe, to the things hidden and revealed of which he had been speaking, he says:—All things—all those things concerning man's relationship to God, and his condition here and hereafter, have not simply been revealed, but been delivered to me,—handed over for adjustment, for discovery to and bestowed upon men ; and chiefly that of the true knowledge of God. Intimate and complete is the mutual knowledge which the Father and the Son have of one another, a knowledge in kind and in degree incommunicable. It is the Father alone who knoweth who the Son is ; the Son alone who knoweth who the Father is. "As the Father knoweth me," said Jesus, "even so know I the Father."* Finite may measure finite, like comprehend its like, man know what is in man, but here it is Infinite embracing Infinite, the

* John x. 15.

Divine Son and the Divine Father compassing and fathoming the Divine Nature, and the Divine attributes belonging equally to both.

And yet there is a knowledge of the Father to which man may reach, yet reach only by receiving it through the Son. Had we been told simply that no man knoweth the Father but the Son, nor the Son but the Father, we should not have known to which of the two we were to look for any such acquaintance with either or both as our finite minds are capable of attaining ; but when Jesus says "no man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him," he announces himself to us as the sole revealer of the Father ; this is no small or secondary part of his gracious office, to make God clearly known to us as our Father which is in heaven. To some obscure and partial knowledge of the Supreme Being as Creator, Upholder, Sovereign, Governor, we may attain without help of this revelation of him by Christ ; but if we would know him in his living personality, know him as a God not afar off but near at hand, know him in all the richness and fullness of his mercy and love, know him as a pitying, forgiving, protecting, providing, comforting, reconciled Father, we

must get at that knowledge through Christ, we must see him as the Son reveals him. No man knoweth thus the Father, but he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.

But who is he to whom this revelation of the Father is offered? Let the broad unrestricted invitation with which the statement of the Saviour is immediately succeeded supply the answer:—"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." This invitation loses half its meaning, taken out of the connection in which it was spoken. We understand and appreciate the fullness and richness of its significance only by looking upon it as grounded on and flowing out of what Christ had the moment before been saying. At first sight it might seem as if there was something like confinement and contraction in the preceding utterances of Jesus. He claims all things as committed to him. Otherwise than through him nothing can come to us. He tells us that for all true knowledge of the Father we must be indebted exclusively to him. As to our knowing and receiving, does this not seem to narrow the channel of their conveyance? Yes, as this channel lies outside our earth, spanning the mysterious distance between it and heaven ;

but watch as this channel touches the earth and spreads out its waters on every side, then see how all narrowness and contraction disappears. "All things are delivered unto me of my Father." But why so delivered, why put so exclusively into his hands? Simply and solely that they might so easily, so freely, so fully come unto ours. For us to go elsewhere than to him, to expect that otherwise than through him we are to receive anything, is to resist and repudiate this ordinance of the Father. But he has all, he holds all as the Treasurer of the Kingdom, the Steward of Divine Mercies, the sinner's divinely constituted Trustee, and he has all and holds all under the condition that there shall be the freest, most unrestricted, most gracious dispensing of all the treasures committed to his custody, that whoever asks shall get, that no needy one shall ever come to him and be sent unrelieved away. "No man knoweth the Father but he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." But does he niggardly withhold that revelation, or restrict it to a few? No; wide as the world is, of all who seek to know the Father that knowing him they may have peace, so wide is the unlimited invitation spread. In many a sublime attractive position

do we see Jesus standing while executing his gracious office here on earth—in none loftier or more divine than when placing himself in the centre of the wide circle of humanity, and, looking round upon the millions of our race,—laborers to weariness,—with this or that other burden pressing them to the earth, with the full consciousness of one who has the power to relieve all who come, he says :—“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Rest,—this is what our inward nature most deeply needs ; for everywhere, in every region of it—in our intellect, our conscience, our affections, our will—the spirit of unrest, like a possessing demon, haunts us with its disturbing presence. Then let us see how Christ would have us bring these vexed souls of ours to him, that from every such haunted region of it he may cast the vexing demon out.

Our intellect, in its search after God, is in unrest, re-echoing the ancient plaint, “Oh that I knew where I might find him! . . . Behold, I go forward, but he is not there ; and backward, but I cannot perceive him : on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him : he hideth himself on the right hand, that I can-

not see him." There dawns upon us the sublime idea of a Being infinitely wise, and just, and good, author of all and orderer of all, but through the clouds and darkness with which his guidance and government of this world is so densely swathed we begin to lose sight of him. Looking at him as revealed alone in the ways of his Providence, we get perplexed as we look around upon a world in which such oppressions, wrongs, injustices are done, where might so often triumphs over right, where sin and misery so fearfully abound, where death comes in to close the short-lived, chequered scene of every earthly life. Faith begins to lose its footing, now believing and now doubting, now all things clear, now all things clouded, restlessly we are tossed as on a troubled sea. What we want is some firm ground for our faith in God to rest on. Jesus Christ supplies that ground in revealing this God to us as our Father, in telling us that such as he himself was, in love and pity and care and help to all around him, such is the God and Father of us all to the whole human family. In our anxiety to get one true clear sight of that Great Being whose doings we contemplate with such a mixture of awe and of uncertainty, we are ready with Philip to say :—" Lord, show us

the Father, and it sufficeth us." The answer comes from the lips of Jesus, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." It is a Father of whose love we have the earthly image in the love of Christ, who rules the world we live in. Can we doubt any longer that wisdom, mercy, justice, and love shall direct the whole train of the administration of human affairs, the whole treatment of each individual of our race?

There is unrest in the conscience. A wounded conscience who can bear? The sense of guilt as it rises within the breast who can quench? The dark forebodings that it generates who can clear away? Men tell us our fears are idle; we try to believe them, and put our foot upon those fears to tread them down, but they spring up afresh beneath our tread. They tell us that God is too merciful—too kind to punish. We try to believe them, knowing that God is a thousandfold milder, more merciful than thought of ours can conceive; but we have only to look within and around us upon the sufferings that sin inflicts, and the vision of a Divinity that does not, will not punish, vanishes like a dream of the night. Where then can our conscience-

troubled spirits find repose, where but in him who hath taken our sin upon him, in whom there is redemption for us through his blood, even the forgiveness of all our sins? If we may go to Christ for anything, it is for this forgiveness. If we may trust him in anything, it is in the bestowal of this gift. If among the things that have been delivered unto him of the Father, there be one that more clearly and conspicuously than another is held out to be taken at once from his most gracious hand, it is the pardon, the peace, the reconciliation with God, offered to us in him. If we put these aside, or will not take them as the fruits of our Lord's passion, death, and righteousness, purchased for us at that great cost to him, gratuitously bestowed on us, then if the higher instincts of our moral and spiritual nature become in any degree quickened, what a weary, toilsome, fruitless task do they set us to execute!

These instincts tell us that we are the creatures of another's hand, the dependents on another's bounty, the subjects of another's rule, that to him our first duties are owing, that against him our greatest offences have been committed, that to stand well with him is the first necessity of our being. How then shall

we remedy the evil of our past ingratitude and disobedience, how shall we bring things right and keep things right between us and God? Oh! if all the anxious thought, and weary labors, the prayers, the pains, the self-restraints, the self-mortifications, the offerings at all the altars, the giving to all the priests, the sacrifices—personal, domestic, social, of affections, of property, of life—that have been made by mankind to turn away the apprehended wrath of Heaven, and to work themselves into something like favor with the powers of the invisible world;—if they could be all brought together and heaped up in one great mass before us, what a mountain-pile of toil and suffering would they exhibit, what a gigantic monument to the sense of sin, the power of conscience in the human heart! . With a most mournful eye we look upon that pile as we remember that it has been heaped up needlessly and in vain, that all that was wanted was the ceasing on the part of those engaged in it from the effort to establish a righteousness of their own before God, the ceasing to revert to any such methods to ward off the displeasure or to win the favor of the Most High, the ceasing to repair to such harbors of refuge as churches, altars and priests:

and the opening simply of the ear to the words of Jesus, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

There is unrest in our affections. Here they foolishly wander, there they bitterly are checked, at times dammed up by manifold obstructions, at times running wildly to waste, ever seeking, never finding full allowed complacent rest. And why? Because nowhere here on earth can a being or object be found on which we can safely, innocently, abidingly lavish the whole wealth of that affection which the heart contains. For the right placing, the full out-drawing, the perfect and the permanent repose of the heart, we want one to love:—above us, so that reverence may mingle with esteem; like us, so that closely and familiarly we may embrace—one in whom all conceivable excellences meet and centre, all that the eye covets to admire, that the heart asks to love. We seek for such an one in vain till we hear Jesus saying, Come unto me, and *I* will give you rest. We go, and all, and more than all, we ask for, could think of, we find in him. Grace and truth blended in perfect harmony, a beauty undimmed by a single blemish, a sympathy constant and entire, a love eternal, unchangeable,

which nothing can quench, from which nothing can separate. Here at last, and here only, do we find one wishing to be loved and worthy to be loved with the full devotion of the heart. Restless till it lights on him, with what a warm embrace when it finds him does the heart of faith clasp Jesus to its bosom! "What is thy beloved more than another beloved?"—may the watchman of the city say. The answer is at hand: "My beloved is the chief among ten thousand, he is altogether lovely. I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine—my Lord, my God, my Shepherd, Saviour, Kinsman, Brother, Friend."

There is unrest in the will. It is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. It aims at, it attempts independence. We would be our own masters, we will not have another to reign over us; and so, instead of the quiet of a settled order, there is confusion and anarchy within. All, indeed, is not left absolutely loose, unreined, unregulated. A yoke of some kind we all are born under, or willingly take on. Some assume the yoke of a single passion of their nature, and if that passion be a strong one, such as covetousness, it is not long ere it turns the man into a slave, making him

a mere beast of burden—time for nothing, care for nothing, taste for nothing, joy in nothing but in working for it and under it. And the more work done for it, the more does it impose—its day of labor without any evening tide, its week without a Sabbath. Nor does it mend the matter much if instead of one there be many such yokes about the neck, jostling one another, fretting and galling the wearer by the force and variety of the impulses that drive him in this direction and in that. It is to all mankind as bearers of the one yoke, or the many, that Jesus says—"Take up my yoke, throw off these others, the yoke of pride, of covetousness, of sensuality, of worldliness, of ambition, of self-indulgence—take on that yoke, which consists in devotedness to me, to duty, in a life of self restraint, in a struggle with all that is evil, a cultivation of all that is beautiful, and good, and holy. A hard yoke you may think this to be, but believe me, my yoke is easy, my burden is light, easier and lighter far than those you are groaning under."

One great reason why we are unconscious of the comparative lightness and easiness of this yoke of the Christian discipleship is that we take it on in the spirit of fear, and of a selfish

mercenary hope, instead of with that trust and love and gratitude which are the soft wrappings which, laid beneath it, make it so easy to be borne. It is as those who have been redeemed to God by Christ's most precious blood, whose sins have been all forgiven them for Jesus' sake, whose peace has been made with God through him ; it is in the spirit of child-like confidence, looking up to God as our Father in heaven, and to himself as having ready in his hand for us the grace and strength we need, that Jesus would have us meet every duty, face every temptation, endure every trial, of the Christian life. But if instead of this it be with a doubtful mind and a divided heart that we put forth the hand to take on the yoke—if we do this, not so much to render a return for a great benefit already received, as to add to our chance of receiving that benefit hereafter—if it be for peace and not from peace, for life and not from life that we are working—what is this but trying without throwing it off to shift the old yoke of self a little, to loosen some of its fastenings, and by their help try to attach to us the new yoke of Christ? Is it wonderful that, encumbered thus, there should be little freedom of motion, little capacity for,

and little enjoyment of, the work of faith and labor of love? If we desire to know how truly easy the yoke of Jesus is, let us first enter into the rest that at once and in full measure he gives to all who come to him—the rest of forgiveness, peace, acceptance with God, And then, animated and strengthened by the possession and enjoyment of this rest, let us assume the yoke, that in the bearing of it we may enter into the further rest that there is for us in him—the rest of a meek and lowly heart, gentle, resigned, contented, patient of wrong, submissive under suffering, a rest not given at once or in full measure to any ; to possess which we must be ready to enter into the spirit of the following verses :

“Fain would I my Lord pursue,
Be all my Saviour taught ;
Do as Jesus bade me do,
And think as Jesus thought,
But 'tis Thou must change my heart,
The perfect gift must come from Thee ;
Meek Redeemer, now impart
Thine own humility.

Lord, I cannot, must not rest
Till I thy mind obtain ;
Chase presumption from my breast,
And all thy mildness gain.
Give me, Lord, thy gentle heart,
Thy lowly mind my portion be ;
Meek Redeemer, now impart
Thine own humility.”

VII.

THE WOMAN WHO WAS A SINNER.*

COMING as it does in the narrative of St Luke (the only evangelist who records it) immediately after that discourse which closed with the invitation, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," how natural the thought that here, in what is told us about the woman who was a sinner, we have one instance—perhaps the first that followed its delivery—of that invitation being accepted,—of one wearied and heavy laden coming to Jesus, and entering into the promised rest. Multitudes had already come to him to get their bodily ailments cured : she may have been the first who came under the pressure of a purely spiritual impulse—grieving, desiring, hoping, loving, to get all and more than all she sought.

* Luke vii. 36-50.

Jesus has accepted the invitation of a Pharisee, and reclines, leaning upon his left arm, his head towards the table, his unsandalled feet stretched outwards. Through the crowd of guests, and servants, and spectators, a woman well known in the city for the profligate life she had been leading, glides nearer and nearer, till she stands behind him. As she stands she weeps. The tears fall thickly upon his feet. She has nothing else with which to do it, so she stoops and wipes the tears away with her loose dishevelled hair. She gently grasps the feet of Jesus to kiss them, and now she remembers the box she had brought, in hope, perhaps, to find some fitting opportunity of pouring its contents upon his head; but she can make no nearer approach, and so she sheds the precious perfumed ointment on those feet which she had washed with her tears, wiped with the hairs of her head, and covered with the kisses of her lips.

What has brought this woman here? what moves her to act in this way to Jesus? Somewhere, somehow Jesus had recently crossed her path. She had heard his calls to repentance, his offers of forgiveness, his promises of peace and rest. The arrow had entered into her soul.

She stood ashamed and confounded. Her iniquities took hold of her so that she was not able to look up, yet deep within her heart new hopes were rising, dimly before her eyes new prospects dawned. All the penitence she experienced, all the new desires, expectations, resolutions, that were filling her breast she owed to him—to the gentle and loving yet resolute and truthful spirit in which Jesus had spoken. She had looked at him, had listened to him, had followed him as he opened those arms of his mercy so widely, and invited all to come to him. And what he so fully offered—the peace of forgiveness, the blessedness of meekness and lowliness, of poverty of spirit, purity of heart—these are what she now, above all things, desired to have. Believing that she can get them alone from him, an irresistible attraction draws her to him. Jewish women were wont to honor, by one or other mark of favor shown, the Rabbi or teacher to whom they felt most attached or indebted. But what shall she render unto One who has already quickened her to a new life of hope and love? She hears of his going to dine with the Pharisee. Too well she knows how this man and his guests will look upon her, what an act of effrontery on her part it will appear that she

should obtrude her presence into such a dwelling at such a time. But faith makes her bold, love triumphs over fear. She presses in and on, till at last she finds herself bending over the feet of Jesus, with the costliest thing she has, the alabaster box of ointment, in her hand. As she stands behind that form, as she stoops to embrace those feet, all the thoughtlessness, the recklessness, the unrestrained self-indulgence of by-past years, the ties she had broken, the injuries she had done, the reproaches she had incurred, the sins she had committed, flash upon her memory. Who is she, that she should come so near and touch so familiarly the pure and the holy Jesus? She cannot meet his eye, she does not press herself upon his notice. But is he not the meek and compassionate, as well as the pure and the holy One? While others had frowned upon her, avoided her, discarded her, treated her as an outcast, had he not shown a deep and tender interest in her, a yearning over her to take her in his hand and lead her back to the paths of purity and peace? It was this kindly treatment that had broken down all power to resist upon her part, which had given him such a hold of her, which had brought her to the house of the Pharisee to see him,

which had drawn her so close to him. But the very thought of all the love and pity that he had shown to her and to all sinners open afresh the fountains of shame and self-reproach, and the tears of a true and deep repentance flow forth ; not the tears of bare self-condemnation—a stinging remorse, goading the spirit to despair. Along with a true sense of her sin there is an apprehension of the Divine mercy—that mercy revealed to her in Jesus. She sorrows not over her sins as one who has no hope : a trust in Christ's readiness and power to pardon and to save her has already entered into her heart. The very sense, however, of his exceeding graciousness quickens the sense of her exceeding sinfulness. The faith and hope to which she has been begotten intensify her penitence, and that penitence intensifies her love ; so that as we look upon her—first standing silently weeping, then bending down and bathing those feet with her tears, then clasping and kissing them and pouring the rich ointment over them—she presents herself to our eye as the most striking picture of a loving, humble penitent at the feet of Jesus which the Gospels present.

It was with a very different sentiment from that with which we are disposed to look at her

that she was looked at by the Pharisee who presided at the feast. He had noticed her entrance, watched her movements, seen that, though not turning round to speak to her, Jesus was not unconscious of her presence, was permitting her to wash and wipe and anoint his feet. For the woman he has nothing but indignation and contempt. He thinks only of what she had been, not of what she is ; and his only wonder as to her is, how she could have presumed to enter here and act as she has been doing. But he wonders, also, at Jesus. He cannot be the prophet that so many take him to be, or he would have known what kind of woman this was ; for he could not have known that and yet allowed himself to be defiled with her touch. Whatever respect he had been prepared to show to Jesus begins to suffer loss, as he sees him allowing such familiarities to be practised by such hands. Not that this respect had ever been very spiritual or very profound. The omissions that our Lord notices—notice not so much in the way of complaint as for the purpose of bringing out the contrast between the treatment given by the two—Simon and the woman—would seem rather to imply that he had not been careful to show any particular

regard to his guest. Perhaps he thought that he was paying such a compliment to Jesus in inviting him to his house that he need be the less attentive to the courtesies of his reception. It was a rare thing for a man like him—a Pharisee—to do such a thing. Simon, however, was not one of the strict and rigid, the religious devotees of his order; he was more a moralist than a pietist; and seeing much in Jesus to approve, and even admire, he was quite ready to ask him to his house, in the hope, perhaps, that in the easy freedom of social intercourse he might test the pretensions of this new teacher, and see further than others into his true character and claims. One mark or token of his order is deeply stamped upon this Simon—pride,—a pride it may have been, a little different from that of the Pharisee whom Jesus represents in the parable as praising himself before God for his fasting twice in the week and giving tithes of all that he possessed, yet quite akin to his in comparing himself with and despising others. He, too, might have stood and prayed thus with himself: God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or as this woman here. Anything like contact, concert, familiar

intercourse with such a low, abandoned woman, no man who had any proper self-respect, he thinks, could practise or endure. And now that he sees Jesus consenting to be touched and handled by her, his only explanation of it is that he cannot know what kind of woman she is. "Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him."*

In thinking and feeling so, he entirely overlooks the change that had taken place—the evidence of which appeared in the very manner of the woman's present conduct, and above all the nature and strength of the tie which that change created between her and Jesus. It was to lift him out of this deep abyss of pride, and if possible to show him how much closer, deeper, tenderer a relationship it was in which this penitent stood to him, than that in which he, Simon, stood, that Jesus stated the case of the two debtors. "And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on.

* Luke vii. 39.

There was a certain creditor which had two debtors : the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most ? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged."

As little as David saw the drift of Nathan's parable of the little ewe lamb, so little did Simon at first perceive the drift of the one now addressed to himself, and so he promptly answers, 'I suppose that it would be he to whom he forgave most. Out of his own mouth he stands convicted. It would be straining the short parable in this instance spoken by our Lord if we took it as strictly and literally representing the relative positions before God in which Simon and the woman stood, or as intimating that both had been actually forgiven, the one as much more than the other as five hundred exceeds fifty pence.

It is not so much the amount actually owed as that known and felt by the debtors to be owing, and their conscious inability to meet in any way the payment, that supplies the groundwork of our Lord's application of the suppositi-

tious case. "And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." Thou hast been watching, Simon, all that this woman has been doing, but what is the true explanation of her conduct, the explanation that vindicates at once her conduct to me and my conduct to her? Why is it that she has been showing me marks of respect, and strong personal attachment contrasting so with those that you have shown, or rather have omitted to show? She has done so, because she loves so much; and she loves so much, because she has been so much forgiven. It is but little compared with her that you feel you owe, but little that you can be forgiven; but little therefore, that you love.

In speaking to him thus, how forbearingly, how leniently did the Lord deal with Simon ; how much more leniently and forbearingly we may be apt to think than he had deserved, or than his case warranted. But it was so in every case with our Divine Master, ever seeking the good of those he dealt with—striving by the gentle insinuations of his grace to win his way into their consciences and hearts, rather than by full display of all their guilt or stern denunciation of it. If in this instance he was successful, if Simon's eyes were opened to discern in the two debtors himself and the woman, and in the creditor to whom all their debts were due none other than He who was sitting at his table, what a wonderful revolution in his estimate of Jesus must have taken place ; for nothing in this whole narrative strikes so much as the simple, natural, easy, unostentatious manner in which Jesus assumes to himself the position of that Being to whom all spiritual debts are owing, and by whom they are forgiven.

“ Her sins,” said Jesus of the woman to Simon, “ which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much.” So to interpret this saying of the Saviour as to make the loving the ground

of the forgiveness would be to contradict both the letter and spirit of the preceding parable, in which the love is represented as flowing out of the forgiveness, and not the forgiveness as flowing out of the love—Jesus points to the love not as the spring but as the evidence of the forgiveness—to the strength of the one as indicating the extent of the other.

When Christ said so emphatically to the Pharisee, “Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee,” the attention of the woman must have been for the moment diverted from her own case, directed to the colloquy that followed, the more so as it seemed at first to have no reference to her. But when He turned, and, looking on her for the first time, said, “Seest thou this woman?” into what a strange tumult of emotion must she have been thrown, all eyes on her—the contrast between her attentions and love to Jesus and those of Simon drawn out in particular after particular by our Lord himself, all closed by her hearing Him declare, “Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven.” The desire, the hope of pardon, had already dawned upon her heart. She had trusted in the Divine mercy as revealed to her in Jesus, and already experi-

enced the relief and comfort this trust was fitted to impart. Her faith, however, was yet imperfect, her sense, her assurance of forgiveness not relieved from uncertainty and doubt ; but now, from the lips of the Lord Himself, she hears the fact announced that her sins had been forgiven, and, as if that were not enough—as if He would do everything that word of his could do, to seal the assurance on her heart—Jesus turns to her and says, “ *Thy sins are forgiven.*” Fear takes wings and flies away, doubt can find no more room within, the sins without number of all her bygone life rush out of sight into the depths of that sea into which Jesus casts them. Not ceasing to be penitent, more penitent than ever, the bowed-down spirit is lifted up as the full blessedness enters and possesses it of one whose transgression is all forgiven, whose sin is altogether covered.

“ *Thy sins are forgiven thee.*” Was it in wonder and with an awe like that of men who feel themselves in the presence of One in whom the most peculiar prerogative of the Divinity resided, or was it in hatred and with contempt of him as an arrogant, presumptuous blasphemer, that those around the table began to say to themselves, “ Who is this that forgiveth sins

also?" Whatever their state of mind was as to himself, Jesus does not lay it bare, nor stop to expose or correct it. But there was one mistake that they might make as to the forgiveness he had pronounced. They might imagine it to have been capriciously or arbitrarily dispensed; they might fail to trace its connection with the spiritual condition of her upon whom it was bestowed; if not dis severing it from its source in him, they might dissociate it from its channel, the faith in him which she had cherished. Even she herself, after what had been said, might be disposed to attach the forgiveness to the love, rather than the love to the forgiveness, overlooking the common root of both in that faith which brought her to Jesus, and taught her to cast her confidence alone and undividedly on him. Therefore his last word, as he dismisses her, is, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." In peace she goes, silently as she had entered; not a single word throughout escaping from her lips, her heart at first too full of humiliation, grief, and shame, now too full of joy and gratitude. In peace she goes, light forever after on her heart the reproach that man might cast upon her—the Christ-given peace the keeper of her mind and

heart. She goes to hide herself from our view, her name and all her after-history unknown. The faith and traditions of Western Christendom have indeed identified her with Mary of Magdala, and assigned to her a place among those women who ministered to the Lord of their substance, who were admitted to close and familiar intercourse with him in Galilee, and who were privileged to be the last attendants on the cross and first visitors of the sepulchre.

We will not presume to say how far the former life of the penitent woman would have interfered with her occupying such a position ; we will not allude to the difficulty that will occur as you try to imagine what substance she could have had, or whence derived, out of which she could minister to Jesus. Neither shall we dwell upon the fact that out of Mary of Magdala seven devils had been cast, a possession not necessarily implying any former criminality of life, yet apparently quite inconsistent with the kind of life that this woman had been leading. Enough, that when Mary, called Magdalene, is first mentioned, as she is in the opening verses of the next chapter in St. Luke's Gospel, she is introduced as a new

person, not amid scenes then, nor at any time thereafter, that in any way connect her with the woman that had been a sinner. It is true that, whilst there is the absence of all evidence in favor of their identification, there is the absence also of evidence sufficient positively to disprove it. In these circumstances it may be grateful to many to trace in the narrative now before us, the earlier history of one so loved, and honored afterwards by Jesus, as was Mary of Magdala. Much more grateful we own to us is the belief that this penitent, whose broken heart was so tenderly upbound—having got the healing from his gentle loving hands—from that notoriety into which her sin had raised her, retired voluntarily into an obscurity so deep that her name and her dwelling-place, and all her after-story, lie hidden from our sight.

The forgiveness so graciously conveyed to this nameless penitent is equally needed by all of us, is offered to us all—Christ is as willing to bestow it upon each of us as ever he was to bestow it upon her. The manner of our possession and enjoyment of this gift depends upon the manner in which we deal with the tender of it made to us by him. We may keep it for-

ever hanging at a distance out before us, a thing desired or hoped for, now with more and now with less eagerness and expectancy, according to the changing temper of our mind and heart. But we might have, we ought to have, this blessing now in hand as our present full secure peace-giving possession. And not till it thus be ours, not till the hand of faith shall grasp and hold it as ours in Christ, ours through our oneness with him in whom we have redemption through his blood, even this very forgiveness of our sins ; not till we exchange the vague and general and vacillating hope for the firm yet humble trust which appropriates at once in its full measure this rich benefit of our Lord's life and death for us ; not till the comforting sense that our sins have been forgiven visits and cheers our heart, can we love our Saviour as he should be loved, and as he wishes to be loved by us. It is when we know how much it is that we have owed, and how much it is that we have been forgiven, that the bond gets closest that binds us to him—a complex, ever-growing, ever-tightening bond, the more that is forgiven ever revealing more that needs forgiveness ; with us as with this woman, as with all true believers, the humility, the penitence, the faith, the love, the peace, that all ac-

company or flow forth from the granted forgiveness, all intensifying each other, all leading us more simply, more entirely, more habitually, more confidingly to Christ, for mercy to pardon and grace to help us in every time of need.

VIII.

THE COLLISION WITH THE PHARISEES—THE FIRST
PARABLES—THE STILLING OF THE TEMPEST—
THE DEMONIAK OF GADARA.*

OUR Lord's second circuit through Galilee, if not more extensive, was more public and formal than the first. He was now constantly attended by the twelve men whom he had chosen out of the general company of his followers, while certain women, Mary, Joanna, Susanna, and many others, some of them of good position, waited on him, ministering to him of their substance. The crowds that gathered round him wherever he went; the wonder, joy, and gratitude with which his miracles, particularly those recent ones of raising the dead, were hailed; the impression his dis-

* Matt. xii. 22-50; xiii. 23-34; Mark iii. 22-30; iv. 5; v. 1-20; Luke xi. 14-54; viii. 22-39

courses had created, and the steps that he had now obviously taken towards organizing a distinct body of disciples, fanned into an open flame the long-smouldering fire of Pharisaic opposition. The Pharisees of Galilee may not at first have been as quick and deep in their resentment as were their Brethren of Jerusalem, neither had they the same kind of instruments in their hands to employ against him. But their resentment grew as the profound discord between the whole teaching and the life of Jesus and their own more fully developed itself, and it was zealously fostered by a deputation that came down from the capital. It had already once and again broken out, as when they had charged him with being a Sabbath-breaker and a blasphemer. On these occasions Jesus had satisfied himself with rebuking on the spot the men by whom the charges had been preferred. But he had not yet broken with the Pharisees as a party, nor denounced them either privately to his disciples or publicly to the multitude. But now, at the close of his second circuit through Galilee, after nearly a year's labor bestowed upon that province, the collision came, and the whole manner of his speech and action towards them was changed.

Early in the forenoon of one of his longest and most laborious days in Capernaum, there was brought to him one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb. Blindness and dumbness, whether springing from original organic defect or induced by disease, he had often before cured. But here, underlying both, was the deeper spiritual malady of possession. Jesus cast the devil out, and the immediate effect of the dispossession was the recovery of the powers of speech and vision. There must have been something peculiar in the case. Perhaps it lay in this, that whereas dumbness in all ordinary cases springs either from congenital deafness or from some defect in the organs of speech, it was due here to neither of these causes. The man could hear as well as others, and once he had spoken as well as they. But from the time the devil entered he had been tongue-tied, had tried to speak but could not. A new and horrible kind of dumbness had come upon him, the closing of his lips by an inward constraint that, struggle as he might, he could not overcome. St. Luke speaks only of the dumbness, as if in it more than in the blindness lay the peculiarity of the case.* St. Matthew records

another instance of the ejection of a devil from one who was dumb, in which the same effect followed ; the dumb speaking as soon as the devil was cast out.* It is at least very remarkable that it was in connexion with this class of cases only that the double result appeared, of an extraordinary commotion among the people and an extraordinary allegation put forward by the Pharisees.

The casting out of devils had been one of the earliest and most common of our Lord's miracles ; always carefully distinguished by the Evangelists from the healing of ordinary diseases ; awakening generally not more wonder, perhaps not so much as some of the bodily cures. If the testimony of Josephus is to be credited, demoniac possession was common at this period, and exorcism by the Jews themselves not unfrequent. But when a dumb devil was cast out, and instantly the man began to speak, we are told that in one instance " the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel ;"* and in another, " All the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the Son of David ?"† Here for the first time was an open expression of an incipient faith in

* Matt. ix. 33.

† Matt. xii. 23.

Jesus as the Messiah, who was known and spoken of all over Judea as the Son of David. Whatever his words and actions might have implied, Jesus had never taken this title to himself—never claimed to be the Messiah; but now the people of themselves began to think that it must be so—that by none other than he could works like these be done. The man whose character the Pharisees had been attempting to malign, whose influence with the people they had been doing their utmost to undermine, is not only hailed as a teacher sent from God, but as a prophet, nay, more than a prophet, the very Son of David. What is to be said and done? The facts of the case they do not, they cannot, deny. That the man's dumbness had been nothing but a common dumbness, that there had been no evil spirit in him to be cast out of him, they do not venture to suggest. Those ingenious Scribes that have come down from Jerusalem can see but one way out of the difficulty. They do not hesitate to suggest it, nor their friends beside them to adopt it; and so they go about the crowd that is standing lost in wonder, saying contemptuously, "This fellow doth not cast out devils but by Beelzebub, the Prince of the Devils." A

wine-bibber, a gluttonous man, a friend of publicans and sinners, a Sabbath-breaker, a blasphemer, they had called him, but here is the last and vilest thing that calumny can say of him—that he is in league with Satan, and that it is to his connexion with the devil, and to that alone, that he owes all his wisdom and his power. How does Jesus meet this calumny? How does he speak of and to the men who were guilty of forging and circulating it? They were busy among the crowd, secretly propagating the slander, but they must not think that he was unconscious or careless of what they were saying of him. He calls them unto him,* and they come. His accusers and he stand forth before the assembled multitude, fairly confronted. First, in the simplest, plainest manner, obviously for the sake of convincing any of the simple-minded people who might be ready to adopt this new solution of the secret of his power, he exposes its foolishness and injustice. There was, he assumes, a prince of the devils, who had a kingdom of his own, opposed to the kingdom of God. That kingdom of darkness might admit of much internal

* Mark iii. 23.

discord, but in one thing it was and must ever be united—in its antagonism to the kingdom of light. No more than any other kingdom, or city, or house, could it stand, were it, in that respect, divided against itself. Yet it was such kind of division that these Pharisees were attributing to it. Their own sons undertook to cast out devils : was it by Beelzebub that they did it? If not, why cast the imputation of doing so upon him? None but a strong one could enter the house of the human spirit, as the devil was seen to enter it in these cases of possession. It must be a stronger than he who binds him, and casts him forth, and strips him of all his spoils. This was what they had just seen Jesus do ; and if he, by the mighty power of God, had done so, then no doubt the kingdom was come unto them—come in his person, his teaching, his work. He—Jesus—stood now the visible head and representative of the kingdom, in the midst of them. To come to him was to enter that kingdom—to be with him was to be on the side of that kingdom ; and such was its nature, such the claims he made, that there could be no neutrality, no middle ground to be occupied. He that was not with him was against him ; he that gath-

ered not with him was scattering abroad. Much there was in the spirit and conduct of many then before him whom the application of this test must bring in as guilty; but let them know that all manner of sin and blasphemy might be forgiven. In ignorance and unbelief they might speak against the Son of Man, and yet not put themselves beyond the pale of mercy; but in presence of that Divine spirit and power in which he spake and acted, not only to ignore it, but to misrepresent and malign it, as these Pharisees had done, was to enter upon a path of willful, perverse resistance to the Spirit of God, which, if pursued, would land the men who took and followed it in a guilt for which there would be no forgiveness, either here or hereafter; no forgiveness, not because any kind or degree of guilt could exhaust the Divine mercy or exceed its power, but because the pursuers of such a path, sooner or later, would reach such a state of mind, and heart, and habit, that all chance or hope of their ever being disposed to fulfill, or capable of fulfilling, those conditions upon which alone mercy is or can be dispensed, would vanish away. The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, which never hath forgiveness, lies not in any single

word or deed. Jesus, though not obscurely hinting that in the foul calumny that had been uttered there lay the elements of the unpardonable offence, does not distinctly say that the men before him never would or could be forgiven for uttering it. His words are words of warning rather than of judgment. A monstrous accusation had been made, one in which if the men who made it persevered, they would be displaying thereby the very temper and spirit of such blasphemy against the Holy Ghost as never would be forgiven. It was out of an evil heart that the evil word had been spoken. It was by a corrupt tree that this corrupt fruit had been borne, and the heart would get worse, the tree more rotten, unless now made better. Such bitter words of ungodly malice and despite as the Pharisees had spoken, were but outward indices of the state of things within. Yet such good signs were words in general, that "Verily," said Jesus. "I say unto you, By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

The men whom Jesus thus publicly rebuked -- characterizing them as a generation of vipers -- for the moment were silenced. Some of their

party, however, now interposed. Jesus had unequivocally asserted that his works had been wrought by none other than the mighty power of God. Let Him prove this as Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Elijah had done. The works themselves were not enough to do this. The popular belief was that demons and false gods could work signs on earth. It was the true God only who could give signs from heaven. Such a sign they had asked Christ to show.* "The people gathered thick together," we are told, to hear Christ's answer: but, as at other times when the same demand was made, our Lord would point to no other sign than that of the most remarkable foreshadowing in Old Testament times of his own resurrection from the dead. This allusion to the extraordinary incident in the history of Jonas was doubly unsatisfactory to his hearers. It was no sign from above, but rather one from below. It was a sign of that of which they had as yet no conception—in which they had no faith—it carried with it to them no additional or confirmatory evidence. No other sign, however, was to be given to a generation which was acting worse than the

heathen inhabitants of Nineveh, the Gentile queen of the south ; a greater than Jonas, a greater than Solomon, was among them, yet they despised his wisdom and would not repent at his call. A brighter light than had ever dawned upon them was now shining—nay, was set up conspicuously for them to behold it ; but there must be an eye within to see, as well as a light without to look at, before any true illumination can take place. And if that eye be evil—be in any way incapacitated for true discernment, whatever the external effulgence be, the body remains full of darkness. Even such a darkness was now settling over a people who were going to present but too sad a type of what was sometimes seen in cases of demoniac possession, when an unclean spirit, for a time cast out, returned with seven other spirits more wicked than itself. From amongst the Jewish people, from and after the Babylonish captivity, the old demon of idolatry had been ejected. For a time the house had been swept and garnished, but now a sevenfold worse infatuation was coming upon this generation, to drive it on to a deadlier catastrophe.

The exciting intelligence that in the presence of a vast multitude Jesus had been accused by

the Pharisees of being nothing else than an emissary and ally of the devil ; that, not satisfied with defending himself against the charge, he had in turn become their accuser, and broken out into the most open and unrestrained denunciation of their whole order ; that the feud which for months past had been secretly gathering strength had ended at last in open rupture, was carried to the house in which Mary and the Lord's brothers were dwelling. A fatal thing it seems to them for him to have plunged into such a deadly strife with the most powerful party in the country. They will try what they can to draw him out of it. They hasten to the spot and find the crowd so large, the press so great, that they cannot get near him. They send their message in to him. "Behold!" says one who is standing next to Jesus, "thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee." A mother who if fond enough was yet so fearful, who once before had tried to dictate to him, and had been checked at Cana ; brethren, who thought that he was beside himself, none of whom as yet believed on him—what right had they to interrupt him at his work—to move him from his purpose ? "Who is my mother ?" said he to the man who

conveyed to him the message, "and who are my brethren? Then pausing, looking "round about on them which sat about him," stretching forth his hands towards his disciples—"Behold!" he exclaimed, "my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." A woman in the crowd, who has been standing lost in a mere human admiration of him, hears his mother spoken of, and cannot in the fullness of her womanly emotion but call her blessed: "Yea, rather blessed," said Jesus to her, "are they that hear the word of God, and keep it."

So, when in the very heart of his mission-work on earth they spake to him about the closest human ties, his nearest earthly relatives—close as these were, and willing as he was in their own mode and sphere to acknowledge them, so resolutely did Jesus wave them aside, so sublimely did he rise above, setting himself forth as the elder brother of that whole family in heaven and earth named by his name, and who are followers in the footsteps of him who came not to do his own will but the will of him that sent him. The earthly and the heavenly bonds, the common and the Christian ties, do not always

coincide, neither are they always in harmony. If ever they interfere—if mother, or brother, or sister, or dearest friend should once tempt us away from him in nearness to whom standeth our eternal life—then let us remember the scene in Capernaum, and ask our Lord to give us of his own Spirit, here as everywhere to follow him.

Jesus did not go out to his mother and brethren when they sent for him, did not go even to their house when fatigue and exhaustion called for a brief repose. He rather accepted the invitation of a Pharisee to take a hurried repast in a neighboring dwelling, the multitude waiting meanwhile for him without. In haste to resume his work, and knowing withal that it was no friendly company he was asked to join, Jesus went in and sat down at once, neglecting the customary ablutions. The host and his friends were not slow to notice the neglect, nor was he less slow to notice the sentence against him they were passing in their hearts. The men around him here were part of that very band whose vile imputation of confederacy with Satan had already released his lips from all restraint, and called for and vindicated his addressing them as he had done.

Nor does he alter now his tone. We may not, indeed, believe that all which St. Luke, in the latter half of the eleventh chapter of his Gospel, records as spoken by him—the woe after woe pronounced upon the Pharisees and the lawyers—was uttered indoors, as soon as he had seated himself at the table. Knowing how usual a thing it is with the three Synoptical Evangelists to bring together into one discourse sentences that were uttered at different times and upon different occasions, we are inclined rather to believe that the greater part of it was spoken after the hasty meal was over, and Jesus stood once more the centre of a vast concourse, with Scribes and Pharisees urging him vehemently, and provoking him to speak many things, lying in wait for him to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him.* They got this out of his mouth, that here in Galilee—a year and more before that memorable day, the last of his public ministry, when he stood within the Temple and closed the exciting controversies with those terrible denunciations which St. Matthew has preserved to us in the twenty-third chapter of his

* Luke xi. 53, 54.

Gospel, in briefer and more compendious terms, the very woes that were then rolled over the heads of the Pharisees of Jerusalem, were rolled over theirs in Capernaum. A new phase of our Saviour's character—very different from that which we had before us in his treatment of the penitent sinner—thus reveals itself to our view ; his firmness, his courage, his outspokenness, the depth of his indignant recoil from, the sternness of his unmitigated condemnation of, the inconsistencies, the hypocrisies, the haughtiness, the cruelty, the tyranny of the Scribes and Pharisees. He had a right to speak and act towards them which none but he could have. He was their omniscient judge, he knew that in hating him they were hating his Father also, that the spirit of persecution which they displayed sprang from a deeper source than mere personal animosity to him as a man. As no other can ever occupy the same position towards his fellow-men as that in which Jesus stood, so to no other can his conduct here be a guide or precedent. One thing only remains for us to do : to try to enter as thoroughly as we can into the entire harmony that there was between all the love, and pity, and gentleness, and com-

passion that he showed towards the ignorant, the erring, the sinful who manifested the least openness to conviction, the least disposition to repent and believe, and that profound and, as we may call it, awful antipathy which he displayed to those who, built up in their spiritual pride, under the very cloak of a pretentious pietism, indulged some of the meanest and most malignant passions of our nature, willfully shutting their eyes to the light of heaven that was shining in the midst of them, and plunging on in the darkness towards nothing short of spoken and acted blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.

But if the forenoon of this long and busy day at Capernaum was rendered remarkable by the change of attitude which Jesus assumed towards the Pharisees, its afternoon was rendered equally if not still more remarkable by the change of method in addressing the multitude. More than half of the term allotted to his ministry in Galilee had now expired. The temper of the community towards him had been fairly tried. The result was sufficiently manifest. Here beside him was a small band of followers—ignorant yet willing to be taught; weak in faith but strong in personal attach-

ment. There against him was a powerful and numerous band, socially, politically, religiously, the leaders of the people. Between the two lay the bulk of the common people—greatly excited by his miracles, listening with wonder and half approval to his words, siding with him rather than against him in his conflict with the Pharisees. With them, if we looked only at external indications, we should say that he was generally and highly popular. But it was popularity of a kind that Jesus had no wish to gain, as he had no purpose to which to turn it. Behind all the show of outward attachment he saw that there was but little discernment of his true character, but little disposition to receive and honor him as the Redeemer of mankind, but little capacity to understand the more secret things of that spiritual kingdom which it was his office to establish and extend. And as he had altered his conduct towards his secret enemies by dragging out their opposition to the light and openly denouncing them, so now he alters his conduct toward his professed friends, by clothing his higher instructions to them in a new and peculiar garb. As he left the house in which the hasty mid-day meal was taken, the crowd gathered round him—in-

creased in numbers, a keener edge put upon its curiosity by what had just occurred. Followed by this crowd, he goes down to the lake side ; finds the press of the people round about him oppressive and inconvenient, sees a boat lying in close to the beach, enters it, sits down, and, separated from them by a little strip of water, addresses the multitude that lines the shore. He speaks about a sower, and how it fared with the seed he sowed : " some of it fell by the wayside, and some upon stony places, and some among thorns, and some upon good soil." He speaks about a field in which good seed was sown by day but tares by night, and how both grew up, and some would have them separated ; but the householder to whom the field belonged would not hear of it, but would have both grow together till the harvest. He speaks of a man casting seed into the ground, and finding that by night and by day, whether he slept or woke, was watching and tending, or doing nothing about it, that seed secretly grew up, he knew not how ; he speaks of the least of seeds growing up into the tallest of herbs ; of the leaven working in the three measures of meal till the whole was leavened ; and he tells his hearers that the kingdom of

heaven is like unto each of the things that he describes. His hearers are all greatly interested, for it is about plain, familiar things of the house, the garden, the field, that he speaks : and yet a strange expression of mingled surprise and perplexity sits upon every countenance. The disciples within the boat share these sentiments equally with the people upon the shore.

Nothing seems easier than to understand these little stories of common life ; but why has Jesus told them ? What from his lips can they mean ? What has the kingdom of heaven to do with them ? Teaching by parables was a common way of instruction with the Jewish Rabbis. But it had not been in the first instance adopted by Christ ; they had not as yet heard a single parable from his lips ; and now he uses nothing else —parable follows parable, as if that were the only instrument of the teacher that Jesus cared to use. And besides the entire novelty of his employment of the parabolic method, there is that haze, that thick obscurity, which covers the real meaning of the parables he utters. The disciples take the first opportunity that offers itself of speaking to him privately, and putting to him the question : “ Why speakest thou to

them in parables?" a question which they would have never put but for the circumstance that they had never before known him employ this kind of discourse. Now mark the answer to the question. "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive; for this people's heart is waxed gross; and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."*

It was partly then for the purpose of concealment that, upon this occasion, these parables were spoken. Those before whose eyes this

* Matt. xiii. 1-15.

veil was drawn had already been tried with a different kind of speech. Most important truths had been announced to them in the simplest and plainest language, but they had shut their minds and hearts against him. And now, as a righteous judgment upon them for having acted thus, these mysteries of the kingdom, which might have been presented to them in another and more transparent guise, are folded up in the concealing drapery of these parables. Speaking generally, parables are meant to make things plainer, not more obscure ; and many of our Lord's parables, such as those of the good Samaritan, the unjust judge, the Pharisee and the publican, it is true that neither by those who first heard them uttered, nor by any who have read them since, has there been the slightest doubt or uncertainty as to their meaning. But there is another and a larger class of the parables of Christ to which this description does not apply, which were not understood by those to whom they were first addressed, which may still be misunderstood, which, instead of being homely tales illustrative of the simplest moral and religious truths, the simplest moral and religious duties, are figurative descriptions, prophetic allegories, in which the true nature of

Christ's spiritual kingdom, the manner of its establishment and extension, and all its after varied fortunes, are portrayed. It was to this class that the parables just spoken by our Saviour belonged. And there was mercy as well as judgment in their employment. Behind their concealing drapery bright lights were burning, the very darkness thrown around intended to stimulate the eye to a keener, steadier gaze. As his disciples had dealt with the instructions that had previously come from his lips differently from those who seeing saw not, hearing would not understand, so now Jesus deals differently with them as to the parables. They appear to have been at first as much in the dark as to their meaning as was the general audience on the shore. But they were willing, even anxious, to be taught. When the cloud came down on the teachings of their Master, and the dark sayings were uttered, they longed to enter into that cloud to gaze upon the light which burned within. They came seeking, and they found ; knocking, and the door was opened to them. To them it was given to know the mysteries of the kingdom, but to the others, uncaring for it, unprepared for it, and unworthy of it as they were, it was not given. By a pri-

vate and full explanation of the two first and leading parables, those of the Sower, and the Tares and the Wheat, Jesus put into his disciples' hands the key to all the eight parables that he delivered ; taught them to see therein the first plantation of the Church—the field, the world—the good seed, the Word of God ; the entrance and the allowed continued presence of obstructions and opposition,—the silent and secret growth of God's empire over human hearts ; the small enlarging into the great ; its pervasive transforming power ; its preciousness, whether found after diligent search, or coming into the possessor's hands almost at unawares ; the end of all in the gathering out of that spiritual kingdom of the Lord of all that should offend.

What was true, locally and temporarily, of the instructions of that single day, of that small section of our Lord's teaching, is true of the whole body of those disclosures of God made to us in the Bible. There are things simple and there are things obscure ; things so plain that he who runs may read ; things so deep that he only can understand who has within him some answering spiritual consciousness or aspiration, out of which the true interpretation

springs. We must first compass the simple if we would fathom the obscure. We must receive into honest hearts and make good use of the plainest declarations of the Divine Word, if we would have that lamp kindled within us, by whose light the more recondite of its sayings can alone be understood. And if we refuse to do so, if we will not follow the course here so plainly marked out for us, if we turn our eyes from that which they could see if they would, if we stop our ears against that which they could understand, if we follow not the heavenly lights already given so far as they can carry us, have we any right to complain if at last our feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and we look for light, and, behold, it is turned into darkness? It is in an inner, remote sanctuary, the true Shekinah, where the light of God's gracious presence still shineth, to be approached with a humble, tractable spirit, the prayer upon our lips and in our heart, "What I know not, Lord, teach thou me; I beseech thee show me thy glory." It is not in the intellect, it is in the conscience, in the heart, that the finest and most powerful organs of spiritual vision lie. There are seals that cover up many passages and pages of the Bible, which no light or fire

of genius can dissolve ; there are hidden riches here that no labor of mere learned research can get at and spread forth. But those seals melt like the snow-wreath beneath the warm breathings of desire and prayer, and those riches drop spontaneously into the bosom of the humble and the contrite, the poor and the needy.

Five parables appear to have been addressed by Jesus to the multitude from the boat, their delivery broken by the private explanation to the disciples of the parable of the Sower. Landing, and sending the multitude away, Jesus entered into the house. There the disciples again applied to him, and he declared unto them the parable of the Tares. Thereafter, the three shorter parables of the Treasure, the Pearl, and the Net were spoken to the disciples by themselves. The long, laborious day was now nearly over, and in the dwelling which served to him as a home while in Capernaum, he might have sought and found repose. Again, however, we see him by the lake-side ; again, under the pressure of the multitudes. Seeking rest and seeing no hope of it for him in Capernaum, Jesus said, "Let us pass over unto the other side." That other eastern side

of the Lake of Galilee offered a singular contrast to the western one. Its wild and lonely hills, thinly peopled by a race, the majority of whom were Gentiles, were seldom visited by the inhabitants of the plain of Gennesaret. Now-a-days both sides of the lake are desert; yet still there is but little intercourse between them. Few travellers venture to traverse the eastern shore; fewer venture far into the regions which lie behind, which are now occupied wholly by an Arab population. As offering to him in some one or other of the deep valleys which cleave its hills and run down into the sea, a shady and secure retreat for a day or two from the bustle and fatigue of his life in Galilee, Jesus proposes a passage across the lake. All is soon ready; and they hurriedly embark, taking Jesus in "even as he was," with no preparation for the voyage. It was, however, but a short sail of six or eight miles. Night falls on them by the way, and with the night one of those terrible hurricanes by which a lake which lies so low, and is bounded on all sides by hills, is visited at times. The tempest smote the waters, the waves ran high and smote the little bark. She reeled and swayed, and at each lurch took in more and more water

till she was nearly filled, and once filled, with the next wave that rolls into her she must sink. They were practised hands that navigated this boat, who knew well the lake in all its moods; not open to unreasonable fear, but now fear comes upon them, and they are ready to give up all hope. Where all this while is he at whose bidding they had embarked? They had been too busy for the time with the urgent work required by the sudden squall, to think of him; the mantle of the night's thick darkness may have hidden him from their view. But now in their extremity they seek for him, and find him "in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow." Unbroken by all the noise of winds and waves without, and all the tumult of those toiling hands within, how quiet and deep must that rest of the wearied one have been! They have some difficulty in awaking him, and they do it somewhat roughly. "Master! Master!" they cry to him, "save us! We perish! Carest thou not that we perish?" With a word of rebuke for their great fear and little faith, Jesus rises, and speaking to the boisterous elements as one might speak to a boisterous child, he says to the winds and the waves, "Peace, be still!"

Nature owns at once the sovereignty of the Lord. The winds cease their blowing—the waves subside—instantly there is a great calm. Those who had sought and roused the sleeping Saviour fall back into their former places, resume their former work ; at the measured stroke of their oars the little vessel glides silently over the placid waters. All quiet now, where but a few minutes before all was tumult ; few words are spoken during the rest of the voyage, the rowers only whispering to each other as they rowed : “ What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the waves obey him ? ”

Jesus lying this moment under the weakness of exhausted strength, rising the next in all the might of manifested omnipotence : in close proximity, in quick succession, the humanity and the divinity that were in him exhibited themselves. Though suddenly roused to see himself in a position quite new to him, and evidently of great peril, Jesus had no fear. His first thought is not of the danger, his first word is not to the tempest, his first care is not for the safety of the body, it is for the state of the spirit of those who wake him from his slumbers ; nor is it until he has rebuked their

fears that he removes the cause, but then he does so, and does it effectually, by the word of his power. And so long as the life we are living shall be thought and spoken of as a voyage, so long shall this night scene on the lake of Galilee supply the imagery by which many a passage in the history of the Church, and many in the history of the individual believer, shall be illustrated. Sleeping or waking, let Christ be in the vessel and it is safe. The tempest may come, our faith be small, our fear be great, but still if in our fear we have so much faith as to cry to him to save us, still in the hour of our greatest need will he arise to our help, and though he may have to blame us for not cherishing a livelier trust and making an earlier application, he will not suffer the winds or the waves to overwhelm us.

The storm is past, the night is over, the morning dawns, the opposite coast of the Gadarenes is reached. Here, then, in these lonely places there will be some rest for Jesus, some secure repose? Not yet, not instantly. Soon as he lands, immediately, from some neighboring place of graves* there comes forth a wild

* As to the locality in which the miracle was wrought see note at the end of the volume.

and frenzied man, a man possessed by many devils ; for a long time so possessed, exceeding fierce so that no man could tame him. They had bound him with fetters and with chains ; the fetters he had plucked asunder, the chains had been broken by him. Flying from the haunts of men, flinging off all his garments, the naked, howling maniac lies day and night among the tombs, crying and cutting himself with stones ; so fiercely assaulting all who approached him that no man might pass by that way. From his lair among the graves the devil-haunted madman rushes upon Jesus. His neighbors had all fled terrified before him. This stranger who has just landed flies not, but tranquilly contemplates his approach. He who had so lately brought the great calm down into the bosom of the troubled lake, is about now to infuse a greater calm into this troubled spirit. The voice that an hour or two before had said to the winds and the waves, "Peace, be still," has already spoken, while yet the poor demoniac is afar off, to the possessing devil that is within, and said, "Come out of him, thou unclean spirit." If underneath that dark and terrible tyranny of the indwelling demons there still survived within

the man some spark of his native independence, some glimmering consciousness of what he once had been and might be again, were but those usurpers of the spirit quieted ; if something of the old man still were there, crouching, groaning, travailing beneath the intolerable pressure that drove him into madness—what a new and strange sensation must have entered this region of his consciousness when the devils which had been rioting within him, claiming and using him as all their own, heard that word of Jesus, and in their terror began to cry out, as in the presence of one their acknowledged Superior and Lord !

What a new light of hope must have come into that wild and haggard eye as it gazed upon that mysterious being, hailed by the devils as the Son of the Most High God ! His relief, indeed, was not immediate ; the devils did not at once depart. There was a short and singular colloquy between Christ and them. They beseech, they adjure him not to torment them before the time, not to send them down at once into the abyss, or if he were determined to give liberty to their human captive, then not to drive them from the neighborhood, which, perhaps, was their only earthly allotted haunt,

but to suffer them to enter into a neighboring herd of swine. The permission was given. They entered into the swine—how we know not, operating upon them how and with what intent we know not. All we have before us is the fact, that the whole herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters. What became of the devils then? As the dumb beasts went down into the waters, did they go down into a darker, deeper depth, to be kept there in chains and darkness to the judgment of the great day? It is not said that the devils purposely destroyed the swine. It no doubt was their entrance and the frenzy into which that entrance drove the animals, that made them plunge headlong into the lake. But who shall tell us whether in their reckless and intense love of mischief the foul spirits did not here outwit themselves, creating an impulse that they could not curb, destroying the new habitation they had chosen, and by their own inconsistent and suicidal acts bringing down upon themselves the very fate from which they had prayed to be delivered? We know far too little of the world of spirits to affirm or to deny here ; far too little for us either mockingly to reject the whole as an idle

tale, or presumingly to speculate as if the mysteries of the great kingdom of darkness stood revealed. It is true, indeed, that whatever was the design or anticipation of the devils in entering into the swine, the result must have been known to Jesus. Knowing then, beforehand, how great the destruction here of property and animal life would be, why was the permission given? We shall answer that question when any man will tell us how many swine one human spirit is worth—why devils were permitted to enter anywhere or do any mischief upon this earth—why such large and successive losses of human and bestial life are ever suffered, the agencies producing which are as much under the control of the Creator as these devils were under that of Christ. To take up the one single instance in which you can connect the loss of life, not directly with the personal agency but evidently with the permission of the Saviour, and to take exception to that, while the mystery of the large sufferance of sin and misery in this world lies spread out everywhere before and around us, is it not unreasonable and unfair? We do not deny that there is a difficulty here. We are not offering any explanation of this difficulty that

we consider to be satisfactory. We are only pleading, first, that in such ignorance as ours is, and with a thousand times greater difficulties everywhere besetting our faith in God, this single difficulty should throw no impediment in the way of our faith in Jesus Christ.

The keepers of the herd, who had waited to see the issue, went and told in the adjoining village and in the country round about all that had happened. At the tidings the whole population of the neighborhood came out to meet Jesus. They found him, with the man who had been possessed with devils, in the manner they all knew so well, sitting at his feet—already clothed, in his right mind, all traces of the possession, save the marks of the bonds and of the fetters, gone. They were alarmed, annoyed, offended at what had happened. There was a mystery about the man, who had such power over the world of spirits, and used it in such a way, that repelled rather than attracted them. They might have thought and felt differently had they looked aright at their poor afflicted brother, upon whom such a happy change had been wrought. But they thought more of the swine that had perished than of the man that had been saved ; and they besought Jesus

to depart out of their coasts. He did not need to have the entreaty addressed to him a second time ; he complied at once—prepared immediately to re-embark, and we do not read that he ever returned to that region again—they never had another opportunity of seeing and hearing him. Nor is it the habit of Jesus to press his presence upon the unwilling. Still he has many ways of coming into our coasts, and still have we many ways of intimating to him our unwillingness that he should abide there. He knows how to interpret the inward turning away of our thoughts and heart from him—he knows when the unspoken language of any human spirit to him is—Depart ; and if he went away so readily when asked on earth, who shall assure us that he may not as readily take us at our word, and when we wish it,—go, go it may be, never to return ?

Christ heard and at once complied with the request of the Gadarenes. But there was another petition presented to him at the same time, with which he did not comply. From the moment that he had been healed, the demoniac had never left his side—never thought of parting from him—never desired to return to home, or friends, or kindred. A bond stronger

than all others bound him to his deliverer. When he saw Jesus make the movement to depart, he accompanied him to the shore ; he went with him to the boat. And as he fell there at his feet, we can almost fancy him taking up Ruth's words, and saying, "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee : for whither thou goest, I will go ; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge ; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." He is ready—he is anxious to forsake all and follow Jesus, but he is not permitted. "Go home to thine own house and to thy friends," said Jesus to him, "and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee."

It was to a heathen home—to friends that knew little about the Lord, and cared little for such knowledge, to whom he was to go. No small trial to be torn thus from the Saviour's side, to go and reside daily among those who had sent the Saviour away from them. But he did it—did more even than he was told to do ; not in his own house alone, nor among his own friends alone, but throughout the whole Gentile district of Decapolis he published abroad the great things that Jesus

had done for him. Better for the man himself—too long accustomed to dwell alone, taking a tincture of the solitary places in which he dwelt into his own spirit, to mix thus freely and widely with his fellow-men; and better undoubtedly it was for those among whom he lived—acting as the representative of him whom in person they had rejected, but who seem to have lent a more willing ear to the man of their own district and kindred, for we are told that as he spake of Jesus, “all men did marvel,” and some, let us hope, did believe.

Let one closing glance be given at the strange picture which this passage in our Saviour’s life presents. It abounds in lights and shadows, in striking contrasts—the meanest selfishness confronted with the purest, noblest love. Reckless frenzy, abject terror, profound attention, devoted attachment, rapidly succeed each other in him who, brought into closest union with the highest and the lowest of the powers of the spiritual world, presents to us a condensed epitome of the great conflict between good and evil—between Christ and Satan—in the domain of the human spirit. Undoubtedly it stands the most remarkable instance of dispos-

session in the gospel narrative, revealing to us at once the depth of that degradation to which our poor humanity may sink, and the height of that elevation to which, through the power and infinite compassion of the Saviour, it may be raised. Was it for the purpose of teaching us more manifestly that Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil, that in that age of His appearance devils were permitted to exercise strange dominion over men? Was it to bring into visible and personal collision the heads of the two opposite spiritual communities—the Prince of Light and the Prince of Darkness—and to make more visible to all men the supremacy of the one over the other? Was it that as the Sun of Righteousness rose in one quarter of the heavens, upon the opposite a cloud of unwonted blackness and darkness was allowed to gather, that with all the greater brightness there might shine forth the bow of promise for our race? Whatever be the explanation, the fact lies before us that demoniacal possessions did then take place, and were not continued. But though the spirits of evil are not allowed in that particular manner to occupy and torment, and degrade us, have they been withdrawn from all access to, and all influence over our souls? With

so many hints given us in the Holy Scriptures that we wrestle not with flesh and blood alone, but with angels and principalities and powers of darkness—that there are devices of Satan of which it becomes us not to remain ignorant—that the great adversary goeth about seeking whom he may devour ; with the command laid upon us, Resist the devil and he will flee from you ; with the promise given, The Lord shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly ; are we not warranted to believe, and should we not be ever acting on the conviction, that our souls are the sphere of an unseen conflict, in which rival spirits are struggling for mastery ? When some light-winged fancy carries off the seed of the word as it drops in our soul, may not that fancy have come at Satan's call, and be doing Satan's work ? When the pleasures, and honors, and riches of this world are invested with a false and seductive splendor, and we are tempted to pursue them as our chief good, may he not have a hand in our temptation who held out the kingdoms of this world and all the glory of them before the Saviour's eye ? But however it may be with evil spirits, we know that evil passions have their haunt and home within our hearts. These, as a strong man armed, keep the house

till the stronger than they appears. That stronger one is Christ. To him let us bring our souls ; and if it please him to bid any unclean spirit go forth, at his feet let us be sitting, and may he make us willing, whatever our own desire might be, to go wherever he would have us go, and do whatever he would have us do.

IX.

THE MISSION OF THE TWELVE.*

JESUS returned across the lake from Gadara to resume his labors in Galilee. The circuit through its southern towns and villages on which he now embarked was the last he was to make. He looked on the multitudes that gathered round him with a singular compassion. Spiritually to his eye they were as sheep scattered abroad, who when he left them would be without a shepherd. "The harvest," said he to his disciples, "truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers unto his harvest." But was he not himself the Lord of the harvest, and had he no laborers to send forth?

Laborers sufficiently numerous, sufficiently

* **Matt.** ix. 35-38 ; **x.** ; **Mark** vi. 7-30 ; **Luke** ix. 1-9.

trained, there were not; but there were those twelve men whom he had chosen, who had for many months been continually by his side. He can send them; not permanently, for as yet they were comparatively unqualified for the work. Besides, to separate them finally from himself would be to disqualify them for the office which they afterwards were to exercise, of being the reporters of his chief sayings, the witnesses of all the leading actions of his life. But he can send them on a brief preliminary experimental tour, one happy effect of which would be, that the townsmen and villagers of Galilee shall have one more opportunity afforded them of hearing the gospel of the kingdom announced. The hitherto close companionship of the twelve with Jesus may have presented to Jewish eyes nothing so extraordinary as to attract much notice and remark. Their great teachers had their favorite pupils, whom they kept continually beside them, and whose services of kindness to them they gratefully received and acknowledged. It was something new, indeed, to see a teacher acting as Jesus did—setting up no school in any one separate locality, confining himself to no one place and to no set times or methods;

discoursing about the kingdom, week-day and Sabbath-day alike, publicly in the synagogue, privately at the supper-table, on roadside and lakeside, from the bow of the boat and the brow of the mountain. And always close to him these twelve men are seen who had forsaken their former occupations, and had now attached themselves permanently to his person, ministering to his comfort, imbibing his instructions, forming an innermost circle of discipleship, within which Jesus was often seen to retire, and to which the mysteries of the kingdom were revealed as there was ability to receive them.

But now a still more singular spectacle is presented. Jesus takes the twelve, and dividing them into pairs, sends them away from him two and two ; delivering to them, as he sends them forth, the address contained in the tenth chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew. A few minute instructions were first given as to the special missionary tour on which they were despatched. It was to be confined strictly to Galilee—to the narrow district that they had already frequently traversed in their Master's company. But he personally was not to be the burden of their message. They were not

to announce his advent as the Messiah. He had not done so himself, and their preaching was not to go beyond his own. They were simply to proclaim the advent of the kingdom, leaving the works and words of Jesus to point out the place in that kingdom which he occupied. The power of working miracles they were for the time to enjoy, but they were not to use it, as they might easily have done, for any selfish or mercenary purpose. As freely as they got, they were to give. They were to be absent but a few days. They were going, not among strangers or enemies, but among friends and brethren. The more easily and expeditiously they got through their work the better. Unprovided and unencumbered, they were to cast themselves at once upon the hospitality of those they visited. "Nor was there in this," says Dr. Thomson, "any departure from the simple manners of the country. At this day the farmer sets out on excursions quite as extensive without a para in his purse, and the modern Moslem prophet of Tarshiha thus sends forth his apostles over this identical region. Neither do they encumber themselves with two coats. They are accustomed to sleep in the garments they wear during the day ;

and in this climate such plain people experience therefrom no inconvenience. They wear coarse shoes, answering to the sandal of the ancients, but never carry two pairs; and, although the staff is the invariable companion of all wayfarers, they are content with *one*.”* The directions given to the Apostles were proper to a short and hasty journey, such as the one now before them. On entering any town or village, their first inquiry was to be for the susceptible, the well-disposed, about whom, after the excitement consequent upon Christ’s former visits, some information might easily be obtained. They were to salute the house in which such resided, to enter it, and, if well received, were to remain in it, not going from house to house, wasting their time in multiplied or prolonged formalities and salutations by the way. Wherever rejected, they were to shake off the dust of their feet against that house or city; and to create a profound impression of the importance of the errand on which they were despatched, Jesus closes the first part of his address to them by

* *The Land and the Book*, p. 346. In St. Matthew’s Gospel it is said they were not to take staves; in Mark, that they were to take one, i. e., one only.

saying, " Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment than for that city."

Hitherto, all that he had said had direct reference to the short and rapid journey that lay immediately before them. But limited as it was, the task now committed to them carried in it the germ, the type, of that larger apostolic work for which, by the gift of the Spirit, they were to be qualified, and in which, for so many years after their Master's death, they were to be engaged. And so, after speaking of the one, Jesus passes on to the other, the nearer and narrower mission sinking out of sight as his eye rests on the further and broader mission that lay before them. In the one, the nearer, there was to be no opposition or persecution ; in the other, a fiery trial was in store for the faithful. The one, the nearer, was to be confined to the lost sheep of the house of Israel ; in the other, they were to come into collision with the kings and governors of the Gentiles. It is of this second period—of the persecution on the one hand, and the gifts of the qualifying Spirit on the other, by which it should be distinguished—that Jesus speaks

in the passage embraced in the verses from the 16th to the 23d. The second division of the address closes, as the first does, by a "Verily I say unto you." The fact thus solemnly affirmed pointing, in the destruction of Jerusalem, to the close of that period over which Christ's prophetic eye was now ranging. Verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come."

But now the whole earthly mission of the twelve presents itself to the Saviour's eye but as the preface and prelude to that continuous abiding work of witnessing for him upon this earth to which each separate disciple of the cross is called. Dropping, therefore, all directions and allusions referring exclusively to the Apostles and to apostolic times, Jesus, in the closing and larger portion of the address, from the 24th to the 42d verse, speaks generally of all true discipleship to himself upon this earth: foretelling its fortunes, describing its character, its duties, its encouragements, and its rewards.

Jesus would hold out no false hopes—would have no one become his upon any false expectations. Misconception, misrepresentation, ill-treatment of one kind or other, his true and

faithful followers must be prepared to meet—to meet without surprise, without complaint, without resentment. The disciple need not hope to be above his Master, the servant above his Lord. “If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more them of his household?” But why should the covert slander, the calumny whispered in secret, be dreaded, when the day was coming when all that is covered shall be revealed, all that is hid shall be made known? With his disciples there should be no concealment of any kind. He came to found no secret society, linked by hidden bonds, depository of inner mysteries. True, there were things that he addressed alone to the Apostles’ ear in private, but the secrecy and reserve so practised by him was meant to be temporary, to be transient. “What I tell you thus in darkness, that speak ye in the light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops.” The doing so may imperil life, the life of the body: but what of that? “Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” But even the life of the body shall be watched over, not suffered

needlessly to perish. Not a single sparrow, though worth but half a farthing, falls to the ground without God's knowledge, not a hair of your head but is numbered by him. "Fear ye not, therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows." The head whose very hairs are numbered by him, your Father will not see lightly or uselessly cut off. Leave your fate then in his hands, and whatever that may be, be open, be honest, be full, be fearless in the testimony ye bear, for "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him I will confess before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I deny before my Father which is in heaven." Times of outward persecution may not last, but think not that on this earth there shall ever be perfect peace. "I came not to send peace, but a sword," a sword which, though it drop out of the open hand of the persecutor, shall not want other hands to take it up and wield it differently. "I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's foes shall be they of his own household." And to no severer trial shall my followers be

subject, than when it is not force but affection, the affection of the nearest and dearest on earth, that would draw them away from me, or tempt them to be unfaithful to my cause.

But above all other claims is the one I make on the love of all who choose me as their Saviour and their Lord. I must be first in their affections: the throne of their heart must be mine; no rival permitted to sit by my side. It is not that I am selfishly exactive of affection; it is not that I am jealous of other love: it is not that I wish or ask that you should love others less in order to love me more: but it is, that what I am to you, what I have done for you, what from this time forth and forevermore I am prepared to be to and to do for you, gives me such a priority and precedence in the claim I make, "that he that loveth father and mother more than me is not worthy of me, and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." A bitter thing it may be to crucify some inordinate earthly desire or affection in order to give me, or to keep me in, that place of supremacy which is the only one I possibly or consistently can occupy. But he that taketh not up the cross for me, even as I have taken up the cross for him; he that will not

deny himself, and in the exercise of that self-denial take up his cross daily and follow me ; “ he is not worthy of me, he cannot be my disciple.” For this is one of the fixed unalterable conditions of that spiritual economy under which you and all men live, that he who maketh the pursuits and the pleasures of the present scene of things the aim of his being ; he who by any manner or form of self-gratification seeks to gain his life shall lose it, shall fail at the last even in the very thing upon which he has set his heart. Whereas he who for my sake shall give himself to the mortifying of every evil affection of his nature, to the crucifying of the flesh with the affections and lusts thereof, he shall find the life he seems to lose ;—out of the death of the lower shall spring the higher, the eternal life of the spirit. And let all of every degree, whether they be Apostles or Prophets, or simple disciples, or the least of these my little ones, be animated, be elevated throughout that strife with self and sin, the world and the devil, to which in Christ they are called, by remembering what a dignified position they occupy, whose representatives they are. “ He that receiveth you receiveth me : he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.” And if it be

in the name or the character of a prophet that any one receives you, he, the receiver, shall have a prophet's reward ; or if in the name simply of a righteous man that any one receive you, he, the receiver, shall have a righteous man's reward ; nay, more, if it be to any of the least of my little ones that a cup only of cold water be given in the name of a disciple, he, the giver, shall in no wise lose his reward. For so it is, and ever shall be, not simply by great men going out upon great embassies and speaking words of power to gathered multitudes, or by great assemblies propounding or enforcing great and solemn truths, that the kingdom of Jesus Christ is advanced, but by all, the high and low, and rich and poor, and weak and strong, who bear his name, looking upon themselves as his missionaries here on earth, sent by him even as he was sent by his Father ; sent, that they may be to one another what he has been to them, seeking each other's good, willing to communicate, giving and in giving receiving, receiving and in receiving imparting, each doing a little in one way or other to commend to others that Saviour in whom is all his trust, these littles making up that vast and ever multiplying agency by which the empire of the Redeemer

over human spirits is being continually enlarged.

Can any one read over and even partially enter into the meaning of those words which Jesus spake to his Apostles when sending them for the first time from his side—a season when there was so little material out of which any rational conjecture could be formed as to his future or theirs, or the future of any school or sect, or institution that He and they might found,—and not be convinced that open as day lay all that future to him who here, as elsewhere in so many of his most important discourses, sets forth in a series of perspectives—mixing with and melting into each other—the whole history of his Church in all its trials and conflicts from the beginning even to the end? But a greater than a Prophet is here—one who speaks of men being hated, persecuted, scourged, and put to death for his name's sake, as if there were nothing in any wise unreasonable or unnatural in it; one who would have all men come to him, and who asks of all who come, love, obedience, and sacrifice, such as but one Being has a right to ask, even he who has redeemed us to God by his blood, whose right over all we are and have and can do

is supreme, unchallengeable, unchangeable, whose, by every tie, we are, and whom, by the mightiest of obligations, we are bound to love and serve.

The sight must have been a very extraordinary one, of the Apostles setting off two by two from their Master's side, passing with such eagerness and haste through the towns and villages, preaching and working miracles. To hear one man preach as Jesus did, to see one man confirm his word by doing such wonderful works, filled the whole community with wonder. To what a higher pitch must that wonder have been raised when they saw others commissioned by him, endowed by him, not only preaching as he did, but healing, too, all manner of disease! True, the circle was a small one to whom such special powers were delegated; but half a year or so afterwards, as if to teach that it was not to the twelve alone—to those holding the high office of the apostolate—that Jesus was prepared to grant such a commission, he sent out a band of seventy men, embracing, we are inclined to believe, almost the entire body of his professed disciples in the north who were of the age and had the strength to execute such a task; ad-

dressings them in almost the same terms, imposing on them the same duties, and clothing them with the same prerogatives, clearly manifesting by his employment of so large a number of his ordinary disciples that it was not his purpose that the dissemination of the knowledge of his name should be confined to any one small and peculiarly endowed body of men.

It appears from the statement of St. Matthew that when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities, continuing thus his own personal labors in the absence of the twelve. How long they remained apart, in the absence of all definite notes of time, can only be a matter of conjecture. A few days would carry the apostles over all the ground they had to traverse, and they would not loiter by the way. Ere very long they were all united once more at Capernaum. Tidings met them there of a very sad event which had just occurred, we know not exactly where, but if Josephus is to be trusted, it was in the remotest region of that district over which Herod Antipas ruled. It is very singular that though Herod governed Galilee, and built and generally resided at Tiberias, a town upon the lake-

side a few miles south of the plain of Gennesaret, he had never met with Jesus ; had done nothing to interrupt his labors, though these were making so great a sensation all over the country ; had never, apparently, till about this time even heard of him or of his works.

It has not unreasonably been conjectured that soon after throwing John the Baptist into prison he had been absent on one of his journeys to Rome during those very months in which our Lord's Galilean ministry was most openly and actively conducted. Even, however, had this not been the case—as we never read of Jesus visiting Tiberias—we can readily enough imagine that Herod might have been living there all the time, too much engaged with other things to heed much what, if at all spoken of in his presence, would be spoken of contemptuously as a new Jewish religious ferment that was spreading among the people. The public tranquillity was not threatened ; and, that preserved, they might have as many such religious excitements among them as they liked. Though fully cognizant of the nature and progress of the nature and progress of the Baptist's ministry, he had done nothing to stop it. It was not on any public or political grounds, but purely and

solely on a personal one, that he had cast John into prison. At first he had listened to him gladly, and done many things at his bidding, but the Baptist had been bold enough to tell him that it was not lawful for him to have his brother's wife, and brave enough at all hazards to keep by what he said. He would neither modify nor retract. Herod's anger was kindled against him, and was well nursed and kept warm by Herodias. She would have made short work with the impudent intermeddler. But Herod feared the people, and so contented himself with casting him into that prison in which he lay so many long and weary months. While lying there alone and inactive, he had sent, as we have seen, two of his disciples to Jesus to ask him, "Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?" It was after all but an indirect and ambiguous reply that they had brought back—enough, and more than enough, to meet any transient doubt as to Christ's character and office which in any quarter might have arisen, but, carrying with it no reference to the Baptist's personal estate—embodying no message of sympathy—holding out no prospect of relief. All that was left to John was to cling to the hope that his long impris-

onment must be near its end. Herod might relent, or Jesus might interpose—somehow or other the deliverance would come. And it did come at last, but not as John had looked for it. It came in the form of that grim executioner, who, breaking in upon his solitude, and flashing before his eyes the instrument of death, bade him bow his head at once to the fatal stroke. Short warning this: was no explanation to be given? no interview with Herod allowed? not a day nor an hour for preparation given? No. The king's order was for instant execution. The damsel was waiting for the head, and the mother waiting for the damsel. How did the Baptist bear himself at that trying moment? There were no crowds to witness this martyr's death; not one there to tell us afterwards how he looked, or what he said. Alone, he had to gird his spirit up to meet his doom. A moment or two, spent we know not how, and the death-blow fell.

It is said that when death comes suddenly upon a man,—when, this moment in full possession of his faculties, he knows that next moment is to be his last—within that moment there flashes often upon the memory the whole scenery of a bygone life. If such a vision of

the past rose up before the Baptist's eye, what a strange mysterious thing might that life of his on earth have seemed,—how like a failure, how seemingly abortive! Thirty long years of preparation; then a brief and wonderful success, brimful of promise; that success suddenly arrested; all means and opportunities of active service plucked out of his hand. Then the idle months in prison, and then the felon's death! Mysterious, inexplicable as such a life might look to the eye of sense, how looked it to the eye of God? Many flattering things have been said of men when they were living; many false and fulsome epitaphs have been graven on their tombs; but the lips that never flattered have said of John, that of those that have been born of women there hath not arisen a greater; his greatness mainly due to his peculiar connexion with Christ, but not unsupported by his personal character, for he is one of the few prominent figures in the sacred page upon which not a single stain is seen to rest. And though they buried him in some obscure grave to which none went on pilgrimage, yet for that tomb the pen that never traced a line of falsehood has written the brief but pregnant epitaph: "John fulfilled his course." Terminat-

ing so abruptly at such an early stage, with large capacity for work, and plenty of work to do, shall we not say of this man that his life was unseasonably and prematurely cut off? No ; his earthly task was done : he had a certain work assigned him here, and it was finished. Nor could a higher eulogium have been pronounced over his grave than this, that he had fulfilled the course assigned to him by Providence. Let the testimony thus borne to him convince us that there is a special and narrow sphere which God has marked out for each of us on earth. To be wise to know what that sphere is, to accept it and keep to it, and be content with it—diligently, perseveringly, thankfully, submissively to do its work and bear its burdens, is one of our first duties—a duty which in its discharge will minister one of our simplest and purest joys.

The bloody head was grasped by the executioner and carried into the king's presence, and given to the damsel ; and she carried it to her mother. The sense of sated vengeance may for the moment have filled the heart of Herodias with a grim and devilish joy ; but those pale lips—those fixed and glazed eyes—that livid countenance upon whose rigid features the shadow of its living sternness is still resting, she can-

not look long at them ; she waves the ghastly object from her sight, to be borne away, and laid we know not where.

The headless body had been left upon the prison floor. So soon as they hear of what has happened, some of John's disciples come and lift it up and bear it out sadly to burial ; and that last office done, in their desolation and helplessness they followed the instinct of that new faith which their Master's teaching had inspired—they went and told Jesus. They did what in all our sorrows we should do : they went and told him who can most fully sympathize, and who alone can thoroughly and abidingly comfort and sustain.

X.

THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND, AND THE WALKING UPON THE WATER.*

HEROD first heard of Jesus immediately after the Baptist's death. While some said that this Jesus now so much spoken of was Elias, or one of the Prophets, there were others about the Tetrarch who suggested that he was John risen from the dead. Herod had little real faith, but that did not prevent his lying open enough to superstitious fancies. He was ill at ease about what he had done on his birthday feast—haunted by fears that he could not shake off. The suggestion about Jesus fell in with these fears, and helped in a way to soothe them. And so, after some perplexity and doubt, at last he adopted it, and proclaimed it to be his own conviction, saying

* Matt. xiv. 13-33; Mark vi. 30-52; Luke ix. 10-17; John vi. 1-21.

to his servants, as if with a somewhat lightened conscience, "This is John, whom I beheaded : he is risen from the dead : and, therefore, mighty works do show forth themselves in him"—John had done no mighty works so long as Herod knew him, but now, in this new estate, he had risen to a higher level, to which he, Herod, had helped to elevate him—he would like to see him in the new garb.

The disciples of John, who came and told Jesus of their master's death, had to tell him also of the strange credulity and curiosity of Herod. We are left to imagine the impression their report created. It came at the very time when the twelve had returned from their short and separate excursions, and when, as the fruit of the divided and multiplied agency that had been exerted, so many were coming and going out and in among the re-assembled band, that "they had no leisure," we are told, "so much as to eat."* For himself and for them, Jesus desired now a little quiet and seclusion. For himself—that he might ponder over a death prophetic of his own, the occurrence of which made, as we shall see, an epoch in his ministry.

* Mark vi. 21.

For them—that they might have some respite from accumulated fatigue and toil. His own purpose fixed, he invited them to join him in its execution, saying to them, “Come ye yourselves into a desert place and rest a while.” Such a desert place as would afford the seclusion that they sought, they had not to go far to find. Over against Capernaum, across the lake, in the district running up northward to Bethsaida, are plenty of lonely enough places to choose among. They take boat to row across. The wind blows fresh from the northwest ; for shelter, they hug the shore. Their departure had been watched by the crowd, and now, when they see how close to the land they keep, and how slow the progress is they make, a great multitude out of all the cities—embracing, in all likelihood, many of those companies which had gathered to go up to the Passover—run on foot along the shore. A less than two hours’ walk carries them to Bethsaida, at the northern extremity of the lake. There they cross the Jordan, and enter upon that large and uninhabited plain that slopes down to the lake, on its northeastern shores. Another hour or so carries them to the spot at which Christ and his apostles land, where

many, having outstripped the boat, are ready to receive them, and where more and more still come, bearing their sick along with them. It was somewhat of a trial to have the purpose of the voyage apparently thus baffled, the seclusion sought after thus violated ; but if felt at all, it sat light upon a heart which, turning away from the thought of self, was filled with compassion for those who were "as sheep not having a shepherd." Retiring to a neighboring mountain, Jesus sits down and teaches, and heals ; and so the hours of the afternoon pass by.

But now another kind of solicitude seizes on the disciples. They may not have been as patient of the defeat of their Master's purpose as he was himself. They may have grudged to see the hours that he had destined to repose broken in upon and so fully occupied. True, they had little to do themselves but listen, and wait, and watch. The crowd grew, however ; stream followed stream, and poured itself out upon the mountain side. The day declined ; the evening shadows lengthened ; yet, as if never satisfied, that vast company still clung to Jesus, and made no movement to depart. The disciples grew anxious. They came at last to

Jesus, and said, "This is a desert place, and the time is now past : send the multitude away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and lodge, and buy bread for themselves, for they have nothing to eat." "They need not depart," said Jesus ; "give you to them to eat." Turning to Philip, a native of Bethsaida, one well acquainted with the adjoining district, Jesus saith in an inquiring tone, "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" Philip runs his eye over the great assemblage, and making a rough estimate of what 'would be required, he answered, "Two hundred pennyworth of bread would not be sufficient for them, that every one might 'get a little ;' shall we go and buy as much?" Jesus asked how much food they had among themselves, without needing to go and make any further purchase. Andrew, another native of Bethsaida, who had been scrutinizing the crowd, discovering some old acquaintances, said, "There is a lad here, who has five barley loaves and two small fishes ; but what are they among so many ?" "Bring them to me," said Jesus. They brought them. "Make the men," he said, "sit down by fifties in a company"—an order indicative of our Lord's design that there

might be no confusion, and that the attention of all might be directed to what he was about to do. The season was favorable—it was the full spring-tide of the year ; the place was convenient—much green grass covering the broad and gentle slope that stretched away from the base of the mountain. The marshalling of five thousand men, besides women and children, into such an orderly array, must have taken some time. The people, however, quietly consented to be so arranged, and company after company sat down, till the whole were seated in the presence of the Lord; who all the while has stood in silence watching the operation, with that scanty stock of provisions in his hand. All eyes are now upon him. He begins to speak ; he prays ; he blesses the five loaves and the two fishes, breaks them, divides them among the twelve, and directs them to go and distribute them among the others.

And now, among those thousands—sitting there and ranged so that all can see what is going on—the mystery of their feeding begins to show itself. There were one hundred companies of fifty, besides the women and children. In each Apostle's hand, as he takes his portion from the hand of Jesus, there is not more than

would meet one man's need. Yet, as the distribution by the twelve begins, there is enough to give what looks like a sufficient portion to each of the hundred men who sits at the head of his company. He gets it, and little enough as it seems for himself, he is told to divide it, and give the half of it to his neighbor, to be dealt with in like fashion. Each man in the ranks, as he begins to break, finds that the half that he got at first grows into a whole in the very act of dividing and bestowing ; the small initial supply grows and multiplies in the transmission from hand to hand, All eat—all are satisfied. "Gather up," said Jesus, as he saw some unused food lying scattered upon the ground, "the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost." They do ; and while one basket could hold the five loaves and the two fishes, it now takes twelve to hold these fragments.

Of the nature and purpose of this great miracle, we shall have something to say hereafter. Meanwhile, let us notice its immediate effect. One of its singularities, as compared with other miracles of our Lord, was this : that such a vast multitude were all at once not only spectators of it, but participators of its benefits. Seven or eight thousand hungry men, women, and

children sit down upon a hillside, and there before their eyes, for an hour or two—full leisure given them to contemplate and reflect—the spectacle goes on, of a few loaves and fishes, under Christ's blessing, and by some mysterious acting of his great power, expanding in their hands till they are all more than satisfied. Each sees the wonder, and shares in the result. It is not like a miracle, however great, wrought instantly upon a single man. Such a miracle the same number of men, women, and children might see, indeed, but could not all see as each saw this. The impression here of a very marvellous exhibition of the Divine power, so near akin to that of creative energy, was one so broadly, so evenly, so slowly, and so deeply made, that it looks to us just what we might have expected when the thousands rise from their seats, when all is over, and say one to another, what they had never got the length of saying previously, "This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world." No longer any doubt or vagueness in their faith—no longer a question with them which prophet or what kind of prophet he was. He is none other than their Messiah, their Prince. He who can do that which they have just seen him

do, what could be beyond his power? He may not himself be willing to come forward, assert his right, exert his power—but they will do it for him—they will do it now; they will take him at once, and force him to be their king. Jesus sees the incipient action of that leaven which, if allowed to work, would lead on to some act of violence. He sees that the leaven of earthliness and mere Jewish pride and ambition has entered even among the twelve, who, as they see and hear what is going on, appear not unwilling to take part with the multitude. It is time for him to interfere and prevent any such catastrophe. He calls the twelve to him, and directs them to embark immediately, to go alone and leave him there, to row back to Capernaum, where, in the course of the night or the next morning he might join them. A strange and unwelcome proposal—for why should they be parted, and where was their Master to go, or what was he to do, in the long hours of that lowering night that was coming down in darkness and storm upon the hills and lake? They remonstrate; but with a peremptoriness and decision, the very rarity of which gave it all the greater power, he overrules their remonstrances, and constrains them

to get into the boat and leave him behind. Turning to the multitude, whose plot about taking and making him a king, taken up by his twelve chief followers, this transaction had interrupted, he dismisses them in such a way, with such words of power, that they at once disperse.

And now he is alone. Alone he goes up into a mountain—alone he prays there. The darkness deepens ; the tempest rises ; midnight comes with its gusts and gloom. There—somewhere on that mountain, sheltered or exposed—there, for five or six hours, till the fourth watch of the night, till after dawn—Jesus holds his secret and close fellowship with Heaven. Into the privacies of those secluded hours of his devotion we presume not to intrude. But if, as we shall presently see was actually the case, this threatened outbreak of a blinded popular impulse in his favor—the attempt thus made, and for the moment thwarted, to take him by force and make him a king—created a marked crisis in the history of our Lord's dealings with the multitudes, as well as of their disposition and conduct towards him,—this night of lonely prayer is to be put alongside of the other instances in which, upon important

emergencies, our Saviour had recourse to privacy and prayer, teaching us, by his great example, where our refuge and our strength in all like circumstances are to be found.

Meanwhile it has fared ill with the disciples on the lake. Two or three hours' hearty labor at the oar might have carried them over to Capernaum. But the adverse tempest is too strong for them. The whole night long they toil among the waves, against the wind. The day had dawned, a dim light from the east was spreading over the water; they had rowed about five-and-twenty or thirty furlongs—were rather more than half-way across the lake—when, treading on the troubled waves, as on a level, solid pavement, a figure is seen approaching, drawing nearer and nearer to the boat. Their toil is changed to terror—the vigorous hand relaxes its grasp—the oars stand still in the air or are but feebly plied—the boat rocks heavily—a cry of terror comes from the frightened crew—they think it is a spirit. He made as though he would have passed them by—they cry out the more. For though so like their Master as they now see the form to be, yet if he go past them in silence, it cannot be other than his ghost. But now he turns, and, dispel-

ling at once all doubt and fear, he says, "Be of good cheer; it is I,—be not afraid." He is but a few yards from the boat, when, leaping at once—as was no strange thing with him—from one extreme to the other, Peter says, "Lord, if it be thou"—or rather, for we cannot think that he had any doubt as to Christ's identity—"Since it is thou, let me come unto thee on the water." Why not wait till Jesus comes into the boat? Because he is so pleased, so proud to see his Master tread with such victorious footstep the restless devouring deep; because he wants to share the triumph of the deed—to walk side by side, before his brothers, with Jesus, though it be but a step or two.

He gets the permission—he makes the attempt—is at first successful. So long as he keeps his eye on Jesus—so long as that faith which prompted the proposal, that sense of dependence in which the first step out of the boat and down upon the deep was taken, remain unshaken—all goes well. But he has scarce moved off from the boat when he looks away from Christ, and out over the tempestuous sea. The wind is not more boisterous—the waves are not higher or rougher than they were the mo-

ment before—but he was not thinking of them then. He was looking at—he was thinking of—he was hanging upon—his Master then. Now he looks at—thinks only of—wind and wave. His faith begins to fail—fearing, he begins to sink—sinking, he fixes his eye afresh and most earnestly on Jesus. The eye, affecting the heart, rekindling faith in the very bosom of despair, he cries out, “*Lord, save me.*” It was the cry of weakness—of wild alarm, yet it had in it one grain of gold. It was a cry to Jesus as to the only one that now could help—some true faith mingling now with all the fear.

The help so sought for came at once. “Immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” At the grasp of that helping hand—at the rebuke of that chiding voice, let us believe that faith came back into Peter’s breast, and that not borne up or dragged through the waters, but, walking by his Master’s side, he made his way back to the little vessel where his comrades were, to take his place among them a wiser and humbler man. As soon as Jesus and he had entered the vessel, we are told that the

wind not only ceased, but that "immediately the ship was at the land wither they went." Of those who were in the ship that night some were exceedingly, but stupidly amazed, their hearts hardened—untouched by the multiplied miracles* of the last twelve hours,—others came and worshipped Jesus, saying "Of a truth thou art the Son of God"—one of the first instances in which this great title, of which we shall have so much to say hereafter, was applied to him.

We may divide the miracles of our Saviour into two classes:—1. Those wrought in or upon nature. 2. Those wrought in or upon man. Of the thirty-three miracles, of which some detailed account is given us in the Gospels, nine belong to the former and twenty-four to the latter class. But this gives no true idea of the mere numerical ratio of the one kind of miracles to the other. It is but a very few of the many thousand cases of healing on the part of Jesus, of which any record has been preserved; whilst it seems probable that all the instances have been recounted in which there was any intervention with the laws or processes

* Mark vi. 51, 52.

of the material universe. It is remarkable at least, that of the small number of this class a repetition of the same miracle is twice recorded—that of the multiplying of bread, and of an extraordinary draught of fishes. Looking broadly at these two classes of miracles, it might appear like a discriminating difference between them—that the one, the miracles on nature, were more works of power, the miracles on man more works of love. And admitting for the moment the existence of some ground for this distinction, it pleases us to think what a vast preponderance Christ's works of love had over his works of power. But it is only to a very limited extent that we are disposed to admit the truth of this distinction. We know of no miracle of our Lord that was a mere miracle of power—a mere display of his omnipotence—a mere sign wrought to prove that he was Almighty. Every miracle of our Saviour carried with it a lesson of wisdom—gave an exhibition of his character—was a type in some lower sphere of his working as the Redeemer of our souls. In a far more intimate sense than any of them was an outward proof of his Divine authority, they were all instances, or illustrations in more shadowy or more sub-

stantial form, of the remedial dispensations of his mercy and grace in and upon the sinful children of men—wrought by him, and recorded now for us—far more to teach us what, as our Saviour, he is—what he has already done, and what he is prepared to do for us spiritually—than to put into our hands evidence of the divinity of his mission.

Let us take the two miracles that we have now before us, both of which belong to the first and smaller class—the miracles on nature. Had it been the purpose of our Lord to make a mere display of his omnipotence in the feeding of five thousand men, one can readily imagine of its being done in a far more visible and striking style than the one chosen. He could have had the men, women, and children go and gather up the stones of the desert or of the lakeside, and as they did so could have turned each stone into bread. Or he could have brought forth the five loaves, and in presence of all the people have multiplied them into five thousand by a wave of his hand—by a word of his power. He chose rather, here as elsewhere—might we not say as everywhere?—to veil the workings of his omnipotence—to hide, as it were, the working of his

hand and power, mingling it with that of human hands and common earthly elements. How much more it was our Lord's design to convey a lesson of instruction than to give a display of his almightiness, we shall better be able to judge when we have before us his own discourse, illustrative of this very miracle, delivered on the following day. We shall then see how apt, and singular, and recondite a symbolism of what he spiritually is to all true believers lay wrapped up in his blessing, and breaking, and dividing the bread.

But further still, was not the agency of all his ministering servants, of all his true disciples, most truly, vividly, picturesquely represented in what happened upon that mountain side? "Give ye them to eat," such were Christ's words to his apostles, as he handed to each of them his portion of the five loaves and the two fishes. Take and break and give to one another, such were the apostles' words to the multitude. And as each took and broke, the half that he kept for himself grew within the hand that broke it, as did in turn the other half he handed to his neighbor. Such was the rule and method of the distribution and multiplication of the bread given to the thousands

on the desert place of Bethsaida. Such is the rule and method of the distribution and multiplication of the bread of life.

Let us gladly and gratefully accept the lessons that the miracle conveys. Let us believe, and act upon the belief, that the readier we are to distribute of that bread to others, the fuller and the richer shall be our own supply—that we do not lose but gain by giving here—that there is that scattereth here and yet increaseth, From hand to hand let the life-giving bread be passed, till all the hungry and perishing get their portion—till all eat and are satisfied.

Or look again at the other miracle—that of walking upon the water. It was indeed a miracle of power, but one also of pity too, and love. He came in the morning watch, far more to relieve from toil and protect from danger his worn-out and exposed disciples, than merely to show that the sovereignty over nature was in his hands. Nor did he let that coming pass without an incident pregnant with spiritual instruction to us also; for is there not much in each of us of Peter's weakness? We may not have his first courage or faith—for there was much of both in the stepping out of the boat; or we may not share in his impetu

ousness and over-confidence ; and so we may not throw ourselves among the waves and winds. But often nevertheless they are around us ; and too apt are we, when so it happens with us, to look at them—to think of our difficulties and our trials and our temptations, till, Christ forgotten and out of sight, we begin to sink, happy only if in our sinking we turn to him, and his hand be stretched out to save us. In his extremity, it was not Peter's laying hold of Christ, it was Christ's laying hold of him that bore him up. And in our extremity it is not our hold of Jesus, but his of us, on which our trust resteth. Our hand is weak, but his is strong ; ours so readily relaxes—too often lets go its hold ; but his—none can pluck out of it, and none that are in it can perish.

XI.

THE DISCOURSE IN THE SYNAGOGUE OF CAPERNAUM.*

WHEN, after a single day's absence on the other side of the lake, Jesus and his disciples returned to the land of Gennesaret, so soon as they were come out of the ship, "straightway," we are told, "they knew him, and ran through that whole region round about, and sent out into all that country, and brought to him all that were diseased, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick ; and whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment : and as many as touched him were made whole."†

Never before had there appeared to be so

* John vi. 22-71.

† Matt. xiv. 35 ; Mark. vi. 54-56.

great and so lively an interest in his teaching, or so large a measure of faith in his healing power. But behind this show of things Jesus saw that there was little or no readiness to receive him in his highest character and office. Some were prepared to acknowledge him as Elias, or one of the prophets ; some, like Herod, to hail him as the Baptist risen from dead ; others, like the multitude on the lake-side, to take him by force and make him a king ; but the notions of all alike concerning him and his mission were narrow, natural, earthly, selfish, unspiritual. It is at this very culminating point of his wonderful apparent popularity, that Jesus begins to speak and act as if the hope were gone of other and higher notions of himself and of the kingdom of God being entertained by the nation at large. Hitherto he had spoken much about that kingdom, and but little about himself ; leaving his place therein to be inferred from what he said and did. He had spoken much about the dispositions that were to be cultivated, the duties that were to be done, the trials that were to be borne, the blessedness that was to be enjoyed by those admitted into the kingdom—of which earlier teaching St. Matthew had preserved a full and

perfect specimen in the Sermon on the Mount ; but he had said little or nothing of the one living central spring of light and life and holiness and joy within that kingdom, giving to it its being, character, and strength. In plainer or in clearer guise he had proclaimed to the multitude those outer things of the kingdom whose setting forth should have allured them into it ; but its inner things had either been kept back from sight, or presented in forms draped around with a thick mantle of obscurity. He had never once hinted at his own approaching death as needful to its establishment—as laying, in fact, the foundation upon which it was to rest ; nor had he spoken of the singular ties by which all its subjects were to be united personally to him, and to which their entrance and standing and privileges within the kingdom were to be wholly due. Now, however, for the first time in public, he alludes to his death, in such a way indeed as few if any of his hearers could then understand, yet one that assigned to it its true place in the economy of our redemption. Now for the first time in public he speaks openly and most emphatically of what he is and must be to all who are saved ; proclaiming a supreme attachment to himself,

an entire and exclusive dependence on himself, a vital incorporating union with himself, to be the primary and essential characteristic of all true subjects of that kingdom which he came down from heaven to set up on earth. From this time he gives up apparently the project of gaining new adherents; withdraws from the crowds, forsakes the more populous districts of Galilee, devotes himself to his disciples, retires with them to remote parts of the country, discourses with them about his approaching decease, unfolding, as he had not done before, both publicly and privately, the profounder mysteries of his person and of his work.

To the discourse recorded by St. John in the sixth chapter of his Gospel, the special interest attaches that it marks this transition point in the teachings and actings of our Lord. The great body of those miraculously fed upon the five loaves and the two fishes dispersed at the command of Christ, and sought their homes or new camping grounds. A number, however, still lingered near the spot where the miracle had been performed. They had seen the apostles go off without Jesus. They had noticed that the boat they sailed in was the only one that had left the shore. They ex-

pected to meet Christ again next morning; but, though they sought for him everywhere around, they could not find him. He must have taken some means to follow and rejoin his disciples, though what these were they cannot fancy. In the course of the forenoon some boats come over from Tiberias, of which they take advantage to recross the lake. After searching for him in the land of Gennesaret they find him at last in the synagogue of Capernaum. The edge of their wonder still fresh, they say to him, "Rabbi, when camest thou hither?"—a mere idle question of curiosity, to which he gives no answer. A far weightier question for them than any as to the time or the manner in which Jesus had got here was, why were they so eagerly following him? This question he will help them to answer. "Verily, verily," is our Lord's reply, "ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles; but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled." The miracle of the preceding evening had introduced a new element of attractive power. The multitudes who had previously followed Jesus to get their sick healed, and to see the wonders that he did, were now tempted to follow him, in the hope of having that miracle

repeated—their hunger again relieved. Sad in heart as he contrasted their eagerness in this direction with their apathy in another, Jesus said to them, “Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give you ; for him hath God the Father sealed.” A dim yet somewhat true idea of what Christ means dawns upon the minds of his hearers. Accepting his rebuke, perceiving that he points to something required of them in order to promote their higher and eternal interests ; knowing no other way in which this could be done than by rendering some service to God, but altogether failing to notice the allusion to the Son of Man and what they were to get from him,—“What shall we do,” they say, “that we may work the works of God?”—tell us what these works are with which God will be most pleased, by the doing of which we may attain the everlasting life. “This,” said Jesus, “is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” It is not by many works, nor indeed, strictly speaking, by anything looked at as mere work, that you are to gain that end. There is one thing here which primarily, and above all others, you

are called to do : to believe on him whom the Father hath sent unto you ; to believe on me : not simply to credit what I say, but to put your supreme, undivided trust in me as the procurer and dispenser of that kind of food by which alone your souls can be nourished up into the life everlasting. It was a large and very peculiar demand on Christ's part, to put believing on himself before and above all other things required. Struck with its singularity, they say unto him, "What sign showest thou that we may see and believe thee?—what dost thou work?" If thou art really what thou apparently claimest to be—greater than all that have gone before thee, greater even than Moses—show us some sign ; not one like those already shown, which, wonderful as they have been, have been but signs on earth ; show us one from heaven like that of Moses, "when our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat."—"You ask me"—such in effect is our Lord's reply—"to prove my superiority to Moses by doing something greater than he ever did ; you point to that supply of the manna as one of the greatest of his miracles. But in doing so you make a twofold mistake.

It was not Moses that gave that bread from heaven. It came from a higher than he—from him who is my Father, and who giveth still the true bread from heaven; not such bread as the manna which was distilled as the dew in the lower atmosphere of the earth, which did not give life, but only sustained it, and that only for a limited time and a limited number. The true ‘bread of God is that* which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.’ ”

Hitherto, Jesus had been speaking of a food or bread which he and his Father were ready to impart; describing it as superior to the manna, inasmuch as it came from a higher region and discharged a higher office, supplying the wants, not of a nation, but of the world; yet still speaking of it as if it were a separate outward thing. Imagining that it was something external, that eye could see, or hand could handle, or mouth could taste, to which such wonderful qualities belonged, with a greater earnestness and reverence than they had yet shown, his hearers say to him, “Evermore give us this bread.” The time has come to drop that form

* Not “he,” as in our translation.

of speech which Jesus hitherto has used ; to cease speaking abstractedly or figuratively about a food or bread, to tell them plainly and directly, so that there could be no longer any misunderstanding, who and what the meat was which endureth unto everlasting life. "Then said he unto them, I am the bread of life : he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." I am not simply the procurer or the dispenser of this bread, I am more—I am the bread. If you would have it, you must not only come to me for it, but take me as it. And if you do so—if you come to me and believe on me—you shall find in me that which will fully and abidingly meet and satisfy all the inward wants and cravings of your spiritual nature, all the hunger and the thirst of the soul. Bring these to me, and it shall not be as when you try to quench or satisfy them elsewhere with earthly things, the appetite growing even the more urgent while the things it feeds on become ever less capable of gratifying. Bring the hunger and the thirst of your soul to me, and they shall be filled. But ye will not do so, ye have not done so. "Ye have seen me, and believe not." It may look thus as if my mission had failed, as if

few or none would come to me that they might have life ; but this is my comfort in the midst of all the preseat and prevailing unbelief, that, "all that the Father giveth me shall come to me," their coming to me is as sure as their donation to me by the Father. But as sure also as is his fixed purpose is this fixed fact, "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out ;" for I came down from heaven on no separate or random errand of my own, to throw myself with unfixed purposes amid unforeseen events, to mould them to unknown or uncertain issues. I came "not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me :—" and that will of his I carry out in rejecting none that come to me, in throwing my arms wide open to welcome every one who feels himself dying of a hunger of the heart that he cannot get satisfied, in taking him and caring for him, and providing for him, not letting him perish—no part of him perish, not even that which is naturally perishable ; but taking it also into my charge to change at last the corruptible into the incorruptible, the natural into the spiritual, redeeming and restoring the entire man, clothing him with the garment meet for a blessed and glorious immortality ; for "this is the Father's will which

hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." Let me say it once again, that no man may think there lies any obstacle to his salvation in a preformed purpose or decree of my Father, that all may know how free their access to me is, and how sure and full and enduring the life is that they shall find in me. "And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one that seeth the Son and believeth on him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."*

Overlooking all the momentous truths; all the gracious assurances and promises that these words of Jesus conveyed, his hearers fix upon a single declaration that he had made. Ignorant of the great mystery of his birth, they murmur among themselves, saying, "Is not this Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it, then, that he saith, I came down from heaven?" Jesus does not answer these two questions, any more than he had answered the question they had put to him at first as to how he had got to Capernaum. He sees and accepts the offence that

* Compare John vi. 39 and 40.

had been taken, the prejudice that had been created, and he does nothing to remove it. He enters into no explanation of the saying that he had come down from heaven ; but he will tell these murmurers and objectors still more plainly than he has yet done why it is that they stand at such a distance and look so askance upon him. "Murmur not among yourselves." Hope not by any such questions as you are putting to one another to solve the difficulties that can so easily be raised about this or that particular saying of mine. What you want is not a solution of such difficulties, which are, after all, the fruits and not the causes of your unbelief. The root of that unbelief lies deeper than where you would place it. It lies in the whole frame and habit of your heart and life. The bent of your nature is away from me. You want the desires, the affections, the aims, the motives which would create within you the appetite and relish for that bread which comes down from heaven. You want that inward secret drawing of the heart which also cometh from heaven, for "no man can come to me except the Father draw him"—a drawing this, however, that if sought will never be withheld ; if imparted, will prevail, for "it is written in

the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man, therefore, that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto me." Not that you are to imagine that you can go to him as you can go to me, that you can see him without seeing me, can hear him without hearing me. "Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is God, he hath seen the Father." It is in seeing me that you see the Father. It is in hearing me that you hear the Father. It is through me that the drawing of the Father cometh. Open eye and ear then, look unto me, hear, and your soul shall live. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me hath everlasting life." He hath it now, he hath it in me. "I am that bread of life." A very different kind of bread from that of which you boast as once given of old through Moses. "Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead." The manna had no life in itself. If not instantly used, it corrupted and perished. It had power to sustain life for a time, but none to ward off death. The bread from heaven is life-giving and death-destroying. "This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die. I am the living bread ; if any man

eat of this bread he shall live forever, and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

However puzzled about the expression of his coming down from heaven, Christ's hearers might readily enough have understood him as taking occasion from the recent miracle to represent himself, the truths he taught, and the pattern life he led, as being for the soul of man what the bread is for his body. But this change of the bread into flesh, or rather, this identifying of the two, this speaking of his own flesh as yet to be given for the life of the world, and when so given to be the bread of which so much had been already said, startles and perplexes them more than ever. Not simply murmuring, but striving among themselves, they say, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"—a question quite akin to that which Nicodemus put when he said, "How can a man be born again when he is old?" And treated by Jesus in like manner, by a repetition, in a still more stringent form, of the statement to which exception had been taken: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." To speak of eating his

flesh was sufficiently revolting to those who understood him literally ; but to Jewish ears, to those who had been so positively prohibited from all use of blood as food, how inexplicable, how almost impious, must the speaking of drinking his blood have been. Indifferent to the effect, our Lord goes on to repeat and reiterate: "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life ; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father : so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me."

Such, as I have attempted in the way of paraphrase to bring them out to view, were the most salient points in our Lord's address, and such the links by which they were united. Among all our Lord's discourses in Galilee this one stands by itself distinguished from all the others by the manner in which Christ speaks of himself. Nowhere else do you find him so entirely dropping all reserve as to his own position, character, services, and claims. Let him be the Eternal Son of the Father who

veiled the glories of Divinity, and assumed the garb of mortal flesh that he might serve and suffer and die for us men and our redemption, then all that he here asserts, requires, and promises appears simple, natural, appropriate. Let the great truths of the Incarnation and Atonement be rejected, then how shall this discourse be shielded from the charges of egotism and arrogance? But Christ's manner of speaking to the people is here as unprecedented as the way of speaking about himself. Here also there is the absence of all reserve. Instead of avoiding what he knew would repel, he seems rather to have obtruded it: answering no questions, giving no explanations, modifying no statements; unsparingly exposing the selfishness, ungodliness, unbelief of his auditors. The strong impression is created that by bringing forth the most hidden mysteries of the kingdom and clothing these in forms fitted to give offence, it was his purpose to test and sift, not the rude mass of his Galilean hearers only, but the circle of his own discipleship. Such at least was its effect; for "many of his disciples when they heard this, said, This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" Jesus does not treat their murmuring exactly as he had that of the Jews; turn-

ing to them, he says, "Doth this about my coming down from heaven offend you?" but "what and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where he was before?" Doth this about eating my flesh and drinking my blood offend you? "It is the spirit that quickeneth," the mere flesh without the spirit profiteth nothing, hath no life-giving power. .

It is by no external act whatever, by no outward ordinance or service, that you are to attain to the life everlasting. It is by hearing, believing, spiritually coming to me, spiritually feeding upon me, that this is to be reached. "The words that I speak unto you, they are the spirit and they are the life." Still I know, for I must speak as plainly to you as to the multitude, "that there are some of you that believe not. Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father." To have hard things said, and then to have the incredulity they generated exposed in such a way and attributed to such a cause, was what many could not bear; and so from that time many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him. With infinite sadness, such a sorrow as he only could feel, his eye and heart follow

them as they go away ; but he lets them go quietly and without further remonstrance ; then, turning to the twelve, he says, “ Will ye also go away ? ”—“ Lord,” is Peter’s prompt reply, “ to whom shall we go ? Thou hast the words of eternal life.” What Jesus thought of this confession we shall see, when not long afterwards it was repeated. Now he makes no comment upon it ; but as one upon whose mind the last impression of the day was that of sadness over so many who were alienated from him, he closes the interview by saying, “ Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil.”

Such were its immediate original results. What would be the effect of a first hearing or first reading of this discourse now ? We cannot well answer the question ; we have read and heard it so often, its phrases are so familiar to our ears, the key to its darkest sayings is in our hands. Nevertheless, are there not many to whom some of its expressions wear a hard and repulsive aspect,—are felt, though they would scarcely acknowledge this to themselves, as overstrained and exaggerated ? It is not possible indeed to understand, much less to sympathize with and appreciate, the fullness

and richness of meaning involved in many of these expressions, unless we look to our Lord's death as the great propitiation for our sins, and have had some experience of the closeness, the tenderness, the blessedness of that mystic bond which incorporates each living member of the spiritual body with Christ the living head. Had Jesus spoken of himself, simply and alone as the bread of life, it had been possible to have understood him as setting forth his instructions and his example as furnishing the best kind of nutriment for the highest part of our nature. Even so strong a phrase as his flesh being the bread might have been interpreted as an allusion to his assumption of our nature, and to the benefits flowing directly from the Incarnation. But when he speaks of his flesh being given for the life of the world, —when he speaks of the drinking of his blood as well as of the eating of his flesh, pronounces them to be the source at first and the support afterwards of a life that cannot die, and that shall draw after it resurrection of the body,—it is impossible to put any rational construction upon phrases like these other than that which sees in them a reference to our Lord's atoning death as the spring and fountain of the new

spiritual life to which through him all true believers are begotten.

But although the great truth of the sacrificial character of Christ's death be wrapped up in such utterances, it is not that aspect of it which represents it as satisfying the claims of justice, or removing governmental obstacles to the exercise of mercy, which is here set forth, but that which views it as quickening and sustaining a new spiritual life within dead human souls. In words whose very singularity and reiteration should make them sink deep into our hearts, our Saviour tells us that until by faith we realize, appropriate, confide in him, as having given himself for us, dying that we might live—until in this manner we eat his flesh, and drink his blood, we have no life in us. Our true life lies in union with and likeness unto God, in peace with him, fellowship with him, harmony of mind and heart with him, in the doing of his will, the enjoyment of his favor. This life that has been lost we get restored to us in Christ. "He that hath the Son hath life." We begin to live when we begin to love, and trust, and serve, and submit to our Father who is heaven; when distance, fear, and doubt give place to filial confidence.

We pass from death unto life, when out of Christ there floweth the first current of this new being into our soul. The life that thus emanates from him is ever afterwards entirely dependent upon him for its maintenance and growth.

Every living thing craves food. It differs from a dead thing in this, that it must find something out of itself that it can take in, and by some process more or less elaborate assimilate to itself; using it to repair the waste of vital energy, to build up the life into full maturity and strength. Such a thing as a self-originated, self-enclosed, self-supporting life you can find nowhere but in God. Of all the lower forms of life upon this earth, vegetable and animal, it is true that by a blind, unerring instinct each seeks and finds the food that suits it best, that is fitted to preserve, expand, and perfect. It is the high but perilous prerogative of our nature that we are left free to choose our food. We may try, do try,—have we not all tried, to nourish our souls upon that which does not and cannot satisfy? Business pleasure, society, wealth, honor,—we try to feed our soul with these, and the recurrent cravings of unfilled hearts tell us that we have

been doing violence to the first laws and conditions of our nature : a nature that refuses to be satisfied unless by an inward growth in all goodness, and truth, and love, and purity, and holiness. It is to all of us, as engaged in the endless fruitless task of feeding with the husks of the earth a spirit that pants after the glory, the honor, and the immortality of the heavenly places, that Jesus comes saying, " Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfieth not ? " " I am the bread of life ; my flesh is meat indeed, my blood is drink indeed."

Bread is a dead thing in itself ; the life that it supports it did nothing to originate. But the bread from heaven brings with it the life that it afterwards sustains. Secret and wonderful is the process by which the living organism of the human body transmutes crude dead matter into that vital fluid by which the ever-wasting frame is recruited and reinvigorated. More secret, more wonderful the process by which the fullness of life and strength and peace and holiness that lie treasured up in the living Saviour passes into and becomes part of that spiritual framework within the soul which groweth up into the perfect man in Christ

Jesus. In one respect the two processes differ. In the one it is the inferior element assimilated by the superior, the inorganic changed into the organic by the energy of the latter ; in the other, it is the superior element descending into the inferior, by its presence and power transmuting the earthly into the heavenly, the carnal into the spiritual. There are forms of life which, derivative at first, become independent afterwards. The child severs itself from the parent, to whom it owes its breath, and lives though that parent dies. The bud or the branch lopped off from the parent stem, rightly dealt with, lives on though the old stem wither away. But the soul cannot sever itself from him to whom it owes its second birth. It cannot live disjoined from Christ, and the life it derives from him it has all the more abundantly in exact proportion to the closeness, the constancy, the lovingness of its embrace of and its abiding in him.

Closer than the closest of all earthly bonds is the vital union of the believer with Christ. One roof may cover those who are knit in the most intimate of human relationships. But beneath that roof, within that family circle, amid all the endearing intercourse and communion

a dividing line runs between spirit and spirit ; each dwells apart, has a hermit sphere of its own to which it can retire, into which none can follow or intrude. But what saith our Lord of the connexion between himself and each of his own ? “ He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him ” He opens himself to us as the hiding-place, the resting-place, the dwelling-place for our spirit. We flee unto him, and he hides us in the secret of his presence, and keeps us secretly in that pavilion. What a safe and happy home ! How blest each spirit that has entered it ! But more wonderful than our dwelling in him is his dwelling in us. What is there in us to attract such a visitant ?—what room within our souls’ suitable to receive him ? Should he come, should he enter, what kind of reception or entertainment can we furnish to such a guest ? Yet he comes—he deigns to enter—he accepts the poor provision—the imperfect service. Nay, more : though exposed to many a slight, and many an open insult, he still waits on ; has pity, has patience, forgets, forgives ; acts as no other guest in any other dwelling ever acted but himself. “ Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice, and open

the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me." "If any man love me, he will keep my words, and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

To a still higher conception of the intimacy of the union between himself and his own does Jesus carry us: "As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me shall live by me." It would seem as if all the earthly imagery elsewhere employed—that of the union of the branches with the vine, of the members with the head, of the building with the foundation-stone—however apt, were yet defective, as if for the only fit, full emblem Jesus had to rise up to the heavens to find it in the closest and most mysterious union in the universe, the eternal, inconceivable, ineffable, union between the Father and himself—"That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one."

There is a resemblance approaching almost to a coincidence between the language used in the synagogue of Capernaum and that used in the upper chamber at Jerusalem. "The bread

that I will give," Jesus said to the promiscuous audience of Galileans, "is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." "Take, eat," such is the language in instituting the Supper; "this is my body broken"—or as St. Luke has it—"given for you." In either case the bread turns into the flesh or body of the Lord. There had been no wine used in the feeding of the five thousand, and so in the imagery of the synagogue address, borrowed obviously from that incident, no mention of wine was made. There was wine upon the supper-table at Jerusalem, and so, just as the bread which was before him was taken to represent the body, the wine was taken to represent his blood. That eating of his flesh and drinking of his blood, of which so much was said at Capernaum, Jesus, in instituting the ordinance of the Supper, taught his disciples to identify with a true union with himself. So close is the correspondence that many have been led to think that it was to the Eucharist, and to it exclusively, that Jesus referred in his Capernaum address. We cannot tell all that was then in our Saviour's thoughts. It may have been that in imagination he anticipated the time when he should sit down with the

twelve. The Holy Communion may have been in his eye as he spake within the Galilean synagogue. But there is nothing in what he said which points to it alone. He speaks of the coming to him, the believing in him as the eating of the bread which is his flesh. He speaks of spiritual life owing its commencement, as well as its continuance, to such coming, such believing, such eating. Is it in the ordinance of the Supper, and in it alone, that we so come and believe, eat and live? Is there no finding and having, no feeding upon Christ but in the Holy Sacrament? Freely admitting that to no season of communion, to no spiritual act or exercise of the believer, do the striking words of our Lord apply with greater propriety and force than to that season and that act, when together we show forth the Lord's death till he come again, we cannot confine them to that ordinance.

XII.

PHARISAIC TRADITIONS—THE SYRO-PHŒNICIAN WOMAN.*

THE Pharisaic party was well organized, watchful, and intolerant. Its chief seat was in the capital, but it kept up an active correspondence with, and had its spies in, all the provinces. Its bitter hostility, aiming at nothing short of his death, which had driven Jesus from Jerusalem, tracked his footsteps all through his Galilean ministry. At an early period of that ministry, Pharisees from Jerusalem are seen obtruding themselves upon him, and now, as it draws near its close another company of envoys from the capital appear. They come down after the Passover, inflamed by the reports carried up to the Feast of the open rupture that had taken place between Christ

and their brethren in Galilee. They come to find out something to condemn, and they have not long to wait. Watching the conduct of Christ and his disciples, they notice what they think can be turned into a weighty accusation against him before the people. Seizing upon some opportunity when a considerable audience was present, they say to Jesus, "Why do thy disciples transgress the traditions of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread."

The oral or traditional law, with its multiplied precepts and manifold observances which had grown up around the written code, had come to be regarded as of equal, nay, in some respects, of superior importance. It was the wine, the rulers said, while the other was but the water. The acknowledgment of its authority forming the peculiar distinctive badge of Pharisaism, such a weight was attached to its observance that breaches of it were looked upon as greater sins than breaches of the written law. Among these was that of eating with unwashed hands. What with Persians, Greeks, and Romans, was but a social custom, the neglect of which was only a social offence, had been raised among the Jews by the traditions

of the elders into a religious duty, the neglect of which was an offence against God. And so strict were they in the observance of the duty, that we read of a Jew of the Pharisaic type who being imprisoned and put on a short allowance of water, chose rather to die than not to apply part of what was given to the washing of his hands before eating. We can have now but an imperfect conception of how great the sin was then thought to be with which those Pharisees from Jerusalem charged publicly our Lord's disciples, aiming their real blow at him by whose precept and example they had been taught to act as they had done. "Why do thy disciples transgress the traditions of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread." No explanation is given—no defence of his disciples is entered on. Our Lord has ceased to deal with such questioners as being other than malignant enemies. He answers their question only by another—"Why do ye transgress the commandment of God by your traditions?" And as they had specified an instance in which the traditions of the elders had been violated by his disciples, he in turn specifies an instance in which they, by their traditions, had nullified a commandment of God. No human duty was

of clearer or more stringent obligation than that by which a child was bound to honor, love, and help his father and his mother. The command enforcing the duty stood conspicuously enshrined among the precepts of the Decalogue. But the elders in their traditions had found out a way of reading it by which the selfishness, or the covetousness, or the ill-will of a child might not only find room for exercise, but might cloak that exercise under a religious garb. All that one who, from any evil motive, desired to evade the obligation of assisting his parents had to do, was to say Corban over that property on which his parents might be supposed to have a claim, to declare it to be consecrated—bound over to the Lord—and he was free. Father or mother might no longer ask or hope for anything at his hands. The property might still be his. He might enjoy the life use of it; but the vow that destined it to God must come in before every other claim. So it was that these traditionalists among the Jews of old quenched the instincts of nature, gave place to evil passions, and broke one of the first and plainest of the Divine commands, all under a pretence of piety. Nor has the spirit by which they were animated in doing so ceased to operate; nor have we

far to go before an exact parallel can be found to the Jewish Corban practice, in the conduct of those who, passing by the nearest relatives, whose very poverty supplies one of the reasons why they are overlooked, bequeath to charitable or religious purposes the money that they cannot carry with them to the grave. Neither charity nor piety, however broad and pretentious the aspects they take, the services that they may seem to render, can ever excuse such a trampling under foot of the primary ties of nature, and the moral duties connected with them. And upon all those hospitals, and colleges, and churches that have been erected and endowed by funds unnaturally and improperly alienated from near and needy relatives, we can but see that old Jewish word Corban engraved, and beneath it the condemning sentence of our Lord—"Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect."

No further answer will our Lord give to the Pharisees than this severe retort. But first to the multitude, and afterwards to his disciples, he will say a word or two of that wherein all real defilement consists—not in the outward, but in the inward ; its source and seat within, and not without. In the evil affections, desires,

and passions of the heart,—in these and what comes out of them pollution lies ; not in eating with unwashed hands ; nor in the violation of any mere external conventional traditional usage.

Jesus had rolled back upon the Pharisees a weightier charge than they had brought against his disciples. He had not hesitated openly to denounce them to the people as hypocrites, applying to them the words of the Prophet, " This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips ; but their heart is far from me." They were offended at being spoken to in such a way. Shunning any further outbreak of their wrath, seeking elsewhere now the rest and the seclusion that he had sought in vain on the eastern side of the lake, Jesus retired to the borders of Tyre and Sidon. He went there not to teach nor to heal, but to enjoy a few days' quiet and repose in the lonely hilly region which looks down upon the two ancient Phœnician cities. But he could not be hid. The rumor of his arrival in the neighborhood passed over the borders of the Holy Land. It reached a poor afflicted mother—a widow, it may have been—whose little daughter was suffering under the frightful

malady of possession. This woman, we are told, was a Greek, a Syro-Phœnician by nation—a Canaanite. Phœnician was the general name given to a race whose colonies were widely spread in very ancient times. One division of this race occupied the country from which they were driven out by the Israelites ; and as that country bordered upon Syria, they were called Syro-Phœnicians by the Greeks and Romans. It was to this tribe that the woman belonged. She was a daughter of that corrupt stock whom the Jews were commissioned to exterminate. But, besides being by nation a Canaanite, she was a Greek ; this word describing not her country, but her creed. She was a heathen, an idolatress—all such, of whatever country, being then called Greeks by the Jews. Such, then, by birth, by pedigree, by religious faith and profession, was this woman, the first and only Gentile—a Canaanite besides—who made a direct personal appeal for help to Christ. The only case of a like kind that meets us in the Galilean ministry was that of the Roman centurion. But he was half a Jew. Moreover, living among Jews, he had his case presented to Jesus by the rulers of the Jews, who had the plea to offer on his behalf,

that he loved their nation, and had built them a synagogue. Here, however, is a Gentile, living among Gentiles, who has no Jewish friends to intercede for her, no services rendered to the Jewish people to point to. It is a pure and simple case of one belonging to the great world of heathendom coming to Jesus. How is she received? Her case, as she presents it to his notice, is of the very kind that we should have said he would be quickest to sympathize with and relieve. Meeting him by the way, she cries out, in all the eagerness of passionate entreaty, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." Jesus had opened willingly his ear to the nobleman of Capernaum pleading for his son; to Jairus pleading for his daughter; the very sight of the widow of Nain weeping over the bier of her only son had moved him, unasked, to interfere. Here is another parent interceding for a child. And that child's condition is one of the most pitiable—in the tender years of girlhood visited with the most frightful of all maladies, in one of the worst of its forms,—grievously tormented with a devil. Such a mother, in the agony of such a grief, crying out to him to have compassion

upon her, and upon her poor afflicted child, will surely not have long to wait. But he hears as though he heard not. He answers her not a word. The kindest of men are not always equally open-eared, open-hearted, or open-handed to the tale of sorrow. Take them at some unlucky moment, and a cool or a rough reception may await the most clamant of appeals. Has anything like this happened to our Lord? Has his spirit been fretted with that late contention with the Pharisees, wearied and worn with the kind of reception his own had given him, so that ear, and heart, and hand are all, for the time, shut up against this new and unexpected appeal of the stranger?

It cannot be. Liable as he was to all common human frailties, our Lord was subject to no such moral infirmity as that. Disappointment, chagrin, disgust never operated upon him as they do so frequently on us, never quenched the benevolence of his nature, nor laid it even momentarily asleep. We must look elsewhere for the solution of the mystery of the silence—for mystery it was. The disciples noticed it with wonder. Their Master had never acted so since they had joined him, had never treated another as he is treating the Canaanite.

But though her cry be thus received, making apparently no impression, moving him to no response, she follows, she repeats her cry ; continues crying, till half in real pity for her and half with the selfish wish to be rid of her importunity, the disciples came to him, saying, " Send her away, for she crieth after us," not that they wanted her to be summarily dismissed, her request ungranted. Christ's answer to this application shows that he did not understand it in that sense ; that he took it as expressive of their desire that he should do what she desired and then dismiss her.

A rare thing this in the history of our Saviour, that he should even seem to be less tender in his sympathy for the afflicted than his disciples were ; that he should need to be importuned by them to deed of charity. But all is rare here ; rare his silence, rare their entreaty, and rare too the next step or stage of the incident. Still heedless of the woman—neither looking at her, nor speaking to her, nor apparently feeling for her—Jesus answers his disciples by saying to them, " I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." He gives this as his reason for paying no attention to this Gentile's request. And it is so

quietly and calmly said that it looks like the expression of a firm and settled purpose. The poor suitor hears it. Does it not at once and forever quench all hope within her breast? His silence might have been due to the absorption of his thoughts with other things. It might be difficult to win the attention or fix it on one who had so little claim on his regard. But now she knows that he has heard, has thought of her, but willfully, deliberately, as it would seem, has waved her suit aside. Child of a doomed rejected race, well mightest thou have taken the Saviour's words as a final sentence, cutting off all hope, sending thee back without relief to thy miserable home, to nurse thy frenzied child in the arms of a dull despair. But there was in thee a depth of affection for that poor child of thine, and a tenacity of purpose that will not let thee give up the case till effort after effort be made. There is in thee, more than this, a keenness of intelligence, a quickness to discern, that, adverse as it looked, an absolute refusal did not lie wrapped up in the Saviour's utterance. He is not sent to any but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but does that bind him to reject the stray sheep of another fold, if perchance it may flee to him

for succor? He comes as a servant, with instructions to confine his personal ministry to the children of a favored race. But is he not a son too as well as a servant? Are his instructions so binding that in no case he may go by a hand's-breadth beyond their line, when so going may serve to further the great objects of his earthly mission? She will try at least whether she cannot persuade him to do so. Undauntedly she follows him into the house into which she sees that he has entered, casts herself at his feet, and says, "Lord, help me!" Before, she had called him Son of David, had given him the title that, from intercourse with Jewish neighbors, she knew belonged to him as the promised Messiah. But now she drops this title. As the Son of David, he was not sent but to the Jews. She calls him, as she worships, by the wider name, that carries no restriction in it, gently intimating that as sovereign Lord of all, he might rise above his commission, and go beyond the letter of the instructions he had received. Lord, she says, as she looks up, adoringly, beseechingly—Lord, help me. She has got him at last to fix his eye upon her. Will he, can he refuse to help? Jesus looks and says, "Let the children first

be filled. It is not meet to take the children's meat, and to cast it to dogs." Last and worst repulse. Bad enough to be told that she lay without the limits of his commission ; but worse to be numbered with the dogs. Yet still she falters not. She accepts at once the reality, the justice, the propriety of the distinction drawn. In the one household there were the children of the family, there were also the dogs, and it was right that they should be fed at different times on different food. In the great human household differences of a like kind existed ; there were the favored sons of Abraham ; there were the outcast children of Ham and Japhet. She neither disputes the fact nor quarrels with those arrangements of Divine Providence under which a different treatment had been given to them,—she takes the lowly place that Christ has given her among the outcast tribes—among the dogs ! But have not the dogs and the children all one master ? Do they not dwell all beneath one roof ? May not even the dogs look for some little kindness at their master's hands ? The finest and the choicest of the food it is right that the children should have, but are there no fragments for them ? " Truth, Lord," she says,

venturing in the boldness of her ardent faith to take up the image that Jesus had used or had suggested, and to construct out of it an argument, as it were, against himself—"Truth, Lord ; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table."

"Truth, Lord, but thou art the Master ; and there dwells in thee such a kind and loving heart, that I will not believe,—no, not though thine own words and deeds may seem to declare it,—that the meanest creature in thy household will be overlooked or unprovided for. Truth, Lord, I am not a child, and I ask not, expect not, deserve not, a child's favor at thine hands. I am but as a dog before thee, and it is no part of the children's food, it is but a crumb from thy richly furnished table that I crave ; and what but such among all the rich and varied blessings that thou hast come to lavish upon thine own—what but such would be the having mercy upon the like of me, and healing my poor afflicted child?" The Saviour's end is gained. It was a peculiar case, and Christ had met it in a peculiar fashion. He was about, still more distinctly and conspicuously than he had done in the case of the Roman officer, by act and deed of his own

hand, to unfold the mystery that had been hid for ages, that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs with the Jews of the great spiritual inheritance of his purchase. In doing so he desired to make it patent upon what ground and principle the door of entrance was to be thrown open. Here was a Canaanitish woman applying to him for help. The curing of her daughter was to be the token that however limited for the time his own personal ministry was to be, it was not to be fixedly and forever exclusive in its character—confined alone to Jews. Here was a Canaanitish woman about to be numbered with those on whose behalf his Divine power went forth to heal. To vindicate her admission within the sphere of his gracious operations, it was to be made manifest that she too, by faith, was a daughter of faithful Abraham. Therefore it was that her faith was subjected to such repeated trial, that impediment after impediment was thrown before it, that it might be thoroughly tested, and come forth from the ordeal shining in the lustre of the fullest and brightest manifestations.

“O woman,” said Jesus to her, when the trial was over and the triumph complete, “O

woman, great is thy faith!" Many things beside had there been to commend in her—her strong maternal love, her earnestness, her importunity, her perseverance, her deep humility. Over all these the Saviour passes, or rather he traces them all up to their common root—her faith in him, her trust under all discouragements—in front of all difficulties—in opposition even to his own words and acts; her trust in his goodwill to her, in his disposition to pity and to help. This is what he commends, admires. Two instances only are recorded in which Jesus passed such an approving judgment, and looked with such admiring regard upon the faith of those who came to him; and it is remarkable that they are those of the two Gentiles—the Roman Centurion and the Syro-Phoenician woman. "Verily," said he of the one, "I have not found so great faith; no, not in Israel!" "Woman," said he to the other, "great is thy faith!" Great faith was needed in those who were the first to force the barrier that ages had thrown up between Jew and Gentile, and great faith in these instances was displayed. Of the two, however, that of the purely Gentile woman was the highest in its character and the noblest in its achievements.

The Roman's faith was in the unlimitedness of Christ's power—a power he believed so great that even as he said to his soldiers "Go!" and they went; "Come!" and they came; "Do this!" and they did it,—so could Jesus say to disease, and life, and death; curing at a distance! saving, by the simple word of his power! The faith of the Canaanite was not simply in the unlimited extent of Christ's power. His power she never for a moment doubted. He had no reason to say to her, *Believest thou that I am able to do this?* But his willingness he himself gave her some reason to doubt. Thousands placed as she was would have doubted,—thousands tried as she was would have failed. Which of us has a faith in Jesus of which we are quite sure that it would come through such a conflict unscathed? In her it never seems for a moment to have faltered. In spite of his mysterious, unexampled silence—of the explanation given of the silence that appeared to exclude,—beneath the sentence that assigned her a place among the dogs, her faith lived on, with a power in it to penetrate the folds of that dark mantle which the Lord for a short season drew around him—to know and see that behind the assumed veil of coldness, silence, in

difference, repulse, reproach, there beat the willing, loving heart, upon whose boundless benevolence she casts herself, trusting, and not being afraid. This was her confidence, that there was more love to her in his heart than the outward conduct of Jesus might seem to indicate. It was this confidence which sustained her from first to last. It was this confidence which carried her over all the obstructions thrown successively before her. It was this confidence which sharpened her wit, and gave her courage to snatch out of Christ's own hand the weapon by which her last and greatest victory was won. It was this confidence in him, in spite of all adverse appearances, which pleased the Lord so much,—for he likes, as we all do, to be trusted in,—and which drew from him the unwonted expression at once of approval and of admiration, “O woman, great is thy faith!” It is the same kind of simple trust in Jesus that we all need; and in us too, if we but had it in like degree, it would accomplish like blessed results. What the silence and the sentences of Jesus were to that entreating woman, crying after Jesus to have her poor child cured, his ways and his dealings, in providence and in grace, are to us crying after him for the

healing of our own or others' spiritual maladies. We cry, but he answers not a word ; we entreat, but he turns upon us a frowning countenance ; when he speaks, his words seem to cut us off from comfort and from help. But deal as he may with us, hide himself as he may, speak roughly as he may, let us still believe that there exists in the heart of our Redeemer a love to us, upon which we can at all times cast ourselves in full unbounded trust.

“ Woman, great is thy faith : be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.”

XIII.

THE CIRCUIT THROUGH DECAPOLIS.*

WE have now to follow Jesus through one of the most singular of his journeyings. His work in Galilee was done, but some days still were left ere he set his face to go up to Jerusalem. These days were devoted to a circuit which carried him in a semicircle round the western, northern, and eastern boundaries of Galilee, keeping him outside the jurisdiction of Herod, and beyond the reach of the Jewish hierarchy. He was seeking for rest, seclusion, security, and he found them where neither the mistaken attachment of his friends, nor the hate of his enemies in Galilee, were likely to follow him. First he travelled over the hilly country that lies to the northwest of the sea of Tiberias. There, as he was passing out of the Galilean

* Matt. xv. 29-39 ; xvi. 1-12 ; Mark vii. 31-37 · viii. 1-26.

territory, he met the Syro-Phœnician woman, and by the manner of his treatment of her revealed at once the simplicity, humility, tenacity of her faith, and the wide embrace of his own love and power. Crossing the boundary-line that divided Palestine from Phœnicia, passing the ancient city of Tyre, he proceeded northward towards Sidon, getting a glimpse there—it may have been a first and last one—of a country in which some of the most ancient forms of heathenism still subsisted, in the worship of Baal and Astarte. Then, turning eastward, he crossed the southern ridge of Lebanon, descended into the valley of the Leontes, skirted the base of the snow-capped Hermon, and, somewhere not far from the sources of the Jordan, entered Decapolis. This was the name given to a large and undefined region which lay around ten cities, to which peculiar privileges were granted by the Romans after their conquest of Syria. All of these, with a single exception, lay to the east and southeast of the Sea of Galilee. At length he came upon that sea, touching it somewhere along its eastern shore, not far, it may have been, from the place where he once before, crossing from Capernaum, had landed for a few hours, and where he

cured the demoniac of Gadara. At the treaty of the multitude Jesus had then instantly retired, not suffering the man upon whom the cure had been wrought to accompany him, but directing him to go and tell what had happened to his family and friends. "And he departed," we are told, "and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him ; and all did marvel." The rumor of that miracle was still fresh, the wonder it had excited had not died away, when, coming through the midst of the coast of Decapolis, Jesus sat down upon one of the mountains that overlook the lake. The community through which he had been moving was more than half heathenish, the Jewish faith and worship having but little hold eastward of the river and the lake. Christ's appearance for the first time among this rude and essentially Gentile population, and the readiness with which he healed the deaf man that had an impediment in his speech, produced the very effect which in such circumstances might have been anticipated. "Great multitudes came to him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others," eagerly but somewhat roughly casting them down at the

feet of Jesus ; wondering as at an altogether new sight, beyond measure astonished when they saw the dumb made to speak, and the blind to see, and the lame to walk, and glorifying, not any of their own idols, but glorifying the God of Israel, in whose name and by whose power these great works were done.*

Three days they crowded in upon Jesus, till about four thousand men, beside women and children, were around him on the mountain side. Many of them had come from a distance, and the food that they had brought with them was exhausted. That they might not go fasting away from him, to faint, it might be, on the road, Jesus repeated the miracle he had once wrought before, on the same side of the lake, but at a different season of the year, and for an entirely different sort of people. Among the coincidences and the differences in the narratives which the evangelists have given of these two miraculous feedings of the multitudes, there is one not preserved in our English version. After the five thousand were fed with the five loaves and the two fishes, the disciples, we are told, took up twelve baskets full of frag-

* Matthew xv. 30, 31.

ments. After the four thousand were fed with the seven loaves and the few small fishes, seven baskets full of fragments were gathered. In the Greek tongue there are two different words, describing two vessels of different size and structure, both of which, without any mark of distinction between them, our translators of the Bible have rendered into the English word "basket." It is one of these words which invariably and exclusively is used in describing the first miracle, and the other which is as invariably and exclusively used in describing the second. The employment in the two cases of two different kinds of vessel has thus been distinctly marked and preserved as one of the slighter circumstantial peculiarities by which the two events were distinguished from one another.

The multitude having been fed and sent away, Jesus took ship and sailed across the lake, landing on its western shores between Tiberias and Capernaum. He had scarcely reappeared in the neighborhood in which most of his wonderful works had been wrought, when, once again, in their old spirit of contemptuous challenge, the Pharisees demand that he would show them a sign from heaven. Now, how-

ever, for the first time, the Sadducees appear by their side, leaguering themselves with the Pharisees in a joint rejection of Christ—in slighting all that he had already said and done—in counting it insufficient to substantiate any claim on his part to be their Messiah, and in demanding the exhibition of some great wonder in the heavens, such as, misreading some of the ancient prophecies, they falsely thought should precede Christ's advent. Saddened and vexed, with a word of stern rebuke to the men who stood tempting him, and a deep sigh heaved over the whole village to which they belonged, Jesus abruptly departed, embarking in such haste that the disciples forgot to furnish themselves with more than a single loaf. As they landed on the other side, Jesus charged them to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The pitiful simplicity which they displayed in failing to see what Jesus meant, and in imagining that because he had used the word "leaven," it must be their having failed to bring bread enough with them that he was pointing at, stirred the gentle spirit of their Master, and led him to administer a more than ordinarily severe rebuke, the main weight of which was laid, not upon their stupidity in not

understanding him, but in their want of trust, their forgetting how the many thousands had been provided for in the desert and on the mountain side.

At Bethsaida, to which place Jesus went on his way to Cæsarea Philippi, they brought a blind man to him, and besought him to touch him. This case, and that of the deaf and stammering man brought to him in Decapolis, have many points of resemblance. In both, those who brought the diseased to Jesus prescribed to him the mode of cure. They besought him to lay his hand upon them, or to touch them. Was it for the very purpose of reproving and counteracting the prejudice which connected the cure with a certain kind of manipulation on the part of the curer, that Jesus in both instances went so far out of his usual course, varying the manner of his action so singularly, that out of all his miracles of healing these two stand distinguished by the unique mode of their performance? This at least is certain, that had Jesus in any instance observed one settled and uniform method of healing, the spirit of formalism and superstition which lies so deep in our nature would have seized upon it, and linked it inseparably with the divine virtue

that went out of him, confounding the channel with the thing that the channel conveyed. More and more, as we ponder the life of our Redeemer, dwelling particularly on those parts of it—such as his institution of the sacraments—in which food might have been furnished upon which the spirit of formalism might have fed, more and more do we wonder at the pains evidently taken to give to that strong tendency of our nature as little material as possible to fasten on.

Besides, however, any intention of the kind thus alluded to, the variations in our Lord's outward modes of healing may have had special adaptation to the state of the individuals dealt with, and may have been meant to symbolize the great corresponding diversity that there is in those spiritual healings of which the bodily ones were undoubtedly intended to be types. Let us imagine that the deafstammerer of Decapolis was a man whose spiritual defects were as complicated as his physical ones ; whose hard, unclean heart it was singularly difficult to reach and to renew ; who required repeated efforts to be made, and a varied instrumentality to be employed, before he yielded to the power of the truth, or was brought under its

benignant sway. Then see with what picturesque fidelity and appropriateness the slowness and difficulty of the one kind of healing was shadowed forth in the other. Jesus took him aside from the multitude, went away with him alone into some quiet and secluded place. The very isolation—the standing thus alone face to face, was of itself fitted to arrest, to concentrate the man's thoughts upon what was about to happen. Then Jesus put his fingers into his ears, as if by this very action he meant to indicate the need there was of an operation which should remove the obstruction, and that his was the hand to do it. Then with a like intent he touched the man's dry and withered tongue with fingers moistened with his own spittle. Then he looked up to heaven and sighed—the sigh unheard—but the look upward, and the emotion which it conveyed, not lost upon the man. Then after all these preliminaries, in course of which we may believe that whatever of incredulity or whatever of unbelief there may have lain within was being gradually subdued, at last he said *Ephphatha*, and the ears were opened and the tongue was loosed.

Two things here were peculiar, the sigh and the preserving the old Aramaic word which

Jesus used. Never in any other instance but in this, when Jesus was about to heal, did a sigh escape from his lips. What drew it forth here? It may have been that as he drew the man aside and confronted him alone, the sorrowful spectacle that he presented became to the quick sympathies of Jesus suddenly and broadly suggestive of all the ills that flesh is heir to, and that it was over them collectively that the sigh was heaved. Such interpretation of its meaning leaves unexplained why it was this case, and it alone, which acted in such a manner upon the sympathies of the Redeemer. But the sigh may have had a deeper source. If this were indeed a man whose soul was difficult of reach and cure, he may have presented himself to Jesus as the type and emblem of those obstinate cases of spiritual malady, some of which would so long resist the great remedy that he came to the earth to furnish.

After the sigh came the utterance *Ephphatha*, a word belonging to that dialect of the old Hebrew language called the Aramaic or Syro-Chaldaic, which was then current in Judea. But if that was the language which Christ ordinarily used—in which, for example, the Sermon on the Mount was spoken—why

was it that in this, and one or two other instances, and in these alone, the exact words which Christ employed are preserved in the evangelic record? It cannot be the peculiarity or solemnity of the occasion, or the particular emphasis with which they were spoken, that entitled them to be selected and preserved, for we can point to many other occasions in which, had Jesus used Aramaic words, they should have had as good, indeed a better claim to have been preserved. The true explanation of this matter seems to be that it was only upon a few rare occasions that Jesus did employ the old vernacular tongue—and that he ordinarily spoke in Greek. It has recently, and as I think conclusively, been established by a great variety of proof, that in the days of our Saviour, the Jews knew and spoke two languages; all the grown-up educated population using the Greek as well as the Aramaic tongue. The Greek predominated in the schools, was employed almost exclusively in written documents and by public speakers. It was in this language that Jesus addressed the crowds in the courts of the temple at Jerusalem, and the multitudes on the hill-sides of Galilee. We have, therefore, in our Greek

New Testament, the very words before us which came from the lips of our Redeemer—more sacred, surely, than if they had been translated from the Aramaic, however faithful the rendering. Assuming that Greek was the language ordinarily employed by our Saviour, it would very naturally occur that occasionally he reverted to the old dialect, and that when he did so the words that he used should have been preserved and interpreted. Thus, for instance, in the house of Jairus, Jesus was in the home of a strictly Jewish family, in which the old language would be used in all domestic intercourse, the little daughter who lay dead there having not yet learned perhaps the newly imported tongue. “How beautifully accordant then with the character of him whose heart was tenderness itself, that as he leant over the lifeless form of the maiden and breathed that life-giving whisper into her ear, it should have been in the loved and familiar accents of the mother tongue, saying, “Talitha cumi!” Although dead and insensible the moment before the words were uttered, yet ere the sound of them passed away there was life and sensibility within her. Does not every reader therefore perceive the thoughtful ten-

derness of the act, and a most sufficient reason why it was in Hebrew and not in Greek that our Lord now addressed her? And do we not also discover a cause why the fact of his having done so should be especially noticed by the evangelist? Are we not thus furnished with a new and affecting example of our Saviour's graciousness? And do we not feel that St. Mark, the most minutely descriptive of all the evangelists, deserves our gratitude for having taken pains to record it? Softly and sweetly must the tones of that loving voice, speaking in the language of her childhood, have fallen upon the sleeping spirit of the maiden, and by words of tenderness, no less than words of power, was she thus recalled to life and happiness."*

It was perhaps still more natural that Jesus, in addressing the deaf stammerer of Decapolis, should have used an Aramaic word. He was a rude mountaineer. The vernacular was perhaps the only language of which he had any knowledge. At any rate, it was the one to which he had been the most accustomed. It could have been solely with a regard to the

* See Roberts' *Discussions on the Gospel*, pp. 89, 90.

man himself that Jesus employed the particular term *Ephphatha*. He meant him to hear and understand it. And it was heard, we believe, and understood ; for this was not a case in which the faculty of hearing and speaking had never existed or been exercised. So soon as the physical impediments were removed, the man could speak as he had spoken before the loss of hearing had been incurred. When, after all the other signs of the coming cure had been given, the emphatic word was at last pronounced, how wise, how gracious was it that that word—the first heard after so many years—should have been one of his well-known, well-loved mother-tongue !

But let us turn now for a moment to the cure of the blind man at Bethsaida. Here, too, we may believe that there was something special in the spiritual condition of the man meant to be typified by the manner of his cure. In the taking of him by the hand, the leading out of the town, the spitting upon his eyes, and putting his hands upon him, Jesus may have had the same objects in view which he had in acting in a similar manner with the deaf man at Decapolis, and the man born blind in Jerusalem ; but there was a singularity that marks

this case off from all the others. It is the only instance of progress in a cure by half and half, of an intermediate stage in the first instance reached. Jesus asked him if he saw aught. He looked up and said that he saw men as trees walking. He saw them—knew them to be men—noticed and described their motion ; but they were shapeless to his eye—looked rather like trees than men. It is this circumstance which leads us to believe that he had not been blind from birth.

To endow a man born blind with the full powers of vision requires a double miracle—one upon the bodily organ, restoring to it its powers ; one upon the mind, conferring upon it the faculty that in the years of infancy a long education is required to impart. A youth who had been blind from birth was couched by Cheselden ; but at first and for some time he could not distinguish one object from another, however different in shape or size. He had to be told what the things were, with whose forms he had been familiar from feeling, and slowly learned to recognize them. And slowly was it that we all in our earliest days learned how to use the eye, and turn it into the instrument of detecting the forms and the magnitudes and the

distances of the objects by which we were surrounded. But here—unless, indeed, we believe that there was a double miracle—so soon as the man got the full power of bodily vision, he knew how to use it, having learnt that art before. It pleased the Saviour, however, to convey again its lost powers to the organ of the eye step by step. There is at first a confusion of the outward forms of things arising from some visional defect. That defect removed, all was clear ; and the subject of this miracle rejoiced in the exercise of a long unused and almost forgotten faculty. It stands a solitary kind of a cure in the bodily healings of our Lord ; but that of which it is the type is by no means so rare. Rather, the rare thing is when anything like full power of spiritual perception is at once bestowed. It is but slowly here that the lost power comes back—that the eye opens to a true discernment of the things of that great spiritual world of which we form a part—sees them in their exact forms, in their relative magnitudes, distances, proportions. Even after the inward eye has been purged of all those films which limit and obscure its sight, a long, a careful, a painstaking education is required to retain it, as our bodily one in infancy

was trained. Nor let us wonder if along the many stages of which this education is made up, we often make singular discoveries of how blind we were before to what afterwards seems clear as day, or that the operations are often painful by which a truer, and a deeper, and a wider spiritual discernment is attained. It is the blessed office of our Saviour at once to restore to the inward eye its power, and to teach us how to use it. Into his hands let us ever be putting ourselves; and let us quietly and gratefully submit to that discipline by which our training in the exercise of all our spiritual faculties is carried on.

XIV.

THE APOSTOLIC CONFESSION AT CÆSAREA- PHILIPPI.*

IN the mythology of the Greeks the worship of Pan—their silvan deity—was always associated with shady cave or woody grotto. The first Grecian settlers in Northern Syria lighted there upon a spot singularly suited for such a worship—a cave at the southern base of Mount Hermon, and at the northeastern extremity of the valley of the Jordan. This cave lay immediately behind a raised yet retired nook or hollow among the hills, and immediately beneath a conical height of more than 1000 feet, rising between two of those deep ravines which run up into the great mountain, upon the summit of which height there now stand the noblest ruins that the whole country around exhibits, equal in extent, if not in

* Matt. xvi. 13-19.

grandeur, to those of Heidelberg—the ruins of the Saracen Castle of Zubeibeh. Immediately beneath the entrance into this cave—along a breadth of more than 100 feet—there gush forth from among the stones a thousand bubbling rills of water, coming from some hidden fountain-head, and from their long dark subterranean journey springing all joyously together into the light of day, forming at once by their union a stream which is one of the chief heads or sources of the Jordan. This lively and full-born stream does instantly a stream's best eastern work—clothes its birth-place with exuberant fertility, shadowing it with the foliage of the ilex and the olive; covering its green swards with flowers of every name, turning it into such a scene that, lost in admiration, Miss Martineau declares that out of Poussin's pictures, she never saw anything in the least like it, while Dr. Stanley calls it a Syrian Tivoli.

This chosen spot the first Grecian settlers seized upon and consecrated, making the cave Pan's sanctuary, cutting niches for the nymphs out of the solid rock which forms the face of the mountain side; which niches—the statues that once occupied them gone—are still to be

seen there ; and called the place Panias, from the name of the deity there worshipped. The Romans when they came did not overturn this worship, but they added a new one. Returning to this beautiful nook, from having escorted Cæsar Augustus to the sea, Herod the Great erected a fine temple of white marble to his great patron. One of his sons, Herod Philip, in whose territory, as Tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis, it was included, extended and embellished the town which had grown up near the old cavern sanctuary. Thinking to change its name, he called it Cæsarea Philippi, in honor of the Roman Emperor, with his own name added, to distinguish it from the Cæsarea of the sea-coast. This new name it bore for a few generations, but the old one revived again, and still belongs to it under the Arabic form of Banias.

It was to this Banias, or Cæsarea-Philippi, that our Lord proceeded, passing through Bethsaida, and up along the eastern banks of the Jordan. In that circuit already described he may have visited it, and the attractions of the place may have drawn him back, or this may have been his first and only visit. It can scarcely be believed that he came into the few scattered villages which lay around, and the

remains of which are still visible, without entering Cæsarea-Philippi itself. His presence there, out of Judea, in a district covered with tokens of heathen worship, his standing before that cave, his gazing upon those buildings, those niches, those inscriptions, now in ruins and defaced, but then telling, in their freshness, of idolatries still in living power, carries Jesus further away from Judaism, and brings him into nearer outward contact with Gentile worship than any other position in which we see him in the Gospel narrative. It were presumptuous in us, where no clue is given, to imagine what the thoughts and intents of the Saviour were ; yet when we find him going so far out of his way, choosing this singular district as the place of his temporary sojourn after all his public labors in Galilee were over ; when we reflect further that now a new stage of his ministry was entered on, and that henceforth from teaching the multitudes he withdrew, and gathering his disciples around him in private, began to speak to them as he had never done before, it is impossible to refrain from cherishing the idea that, surrounded now by the emblems of various faiths and worships, types of the motley forms of superstition that had spread all over

the earth, the thoughts of the Redeemer took within their wide embrace that world whose faith and worship he had come to purify, and that he had, in fact, purposely chosen, as in harmony with this epoch of his life, and the purposes he was about to execute, the unique, secluded, romantic district of Cæsarea-Philippi.

He was wandering in one of its lonely roads with his disciples, his sole companions, when he left them for a little while to engage in solitary prayer,* to commit himself and his great work, as it was passing into a new stage, to his Father in heaven. On rejoining them, he put to them the question, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" He knew it already, but for a further purpose he would fain have from their lips what the gross result of those two years' toil and teaching was—what the ideas were about himself, his person, character, and office, which his fellow-countrymen now generally entertained. They told him—more than one of them taking part in the reply—that some said that he was John the Baptist; some that he was Elias; some Jeremiah; some, without determining which, that he was

* Luke ix. 18.

one of the prophets. His own immediate followers may have got somewhat further in their conceptions. Listening to and believing in, though not fully understanding, the testimony of the Baptist, Andrew might say to his own brother Simon, "We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ;" and Nathanael, remembering what the voice from heaven at the baptism had been reported as declaring, might exclaim, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God: thou art the King of Israel." Here and there, by dumb and blind men, and Syro-Phœnician women, he might be hailed as the Son of David, or the Son of God. On the first impulse of their wonder at all being miraculously fed, five thousand men might be ready in the moment to say of him, that he was the prophet that should come into the world. But these were the exceptions, exceptions so rare, that they seemed not to his disciples worthy of account. Amid all the variety of impressions made upon them by the discourses and works of our Lord, the great mass of the people in Judea and in Galilee regarded Jesus as the Messiah's forerunner, or one of his heralds, not as the Messiah himself. It was the popular belief of the period, that prior to

the Messiah's advent one or other of the prophets was to rise again from the dead. This Jesus might be he. The Pharisees had not succeeded in shaking the public confidence in him as a pure and holy man, well worthy to be counted as a prophet. But they had prevailed in scattering the first impressions that the Baptist's ministry and his own word and deeds had created, that he indeed was the Christ. And now from the lips of his own followers Jesus hears what was so well fitted to try their faith and their Master's patience, that scarcely anywhere over all the land was there any recognition of the Messiahship of Jesus.

On getting their answer, no word of reproach or complaint escapes the Saviour's lips. It was not indeed on his own account, it was on theirs, that his first question had been put. He follows it with the second and more pointed one : "But whom say ye that I am?" Peter, the ever-ready answerer, replies, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Peter had believed, from the beginning of his connexion with him, that Jesus was the Christ ; a faith which had the great and acknowledged authority of the Baptist to rest on, and which was borne up by the hope that the whole nation

would speedily accept him as such. But in the Baptist's death, that authority has been violently shaken, and the outward and expected support has utterly given way. Many of the Lord's disciples have forsaken him, and looking all around, Peter can find few now who so believe. Yet, amid all the prevailing unbelief in and rejection of his Master, Peter's faith has been gaining and not losing strength. Like the inhabitants of Sychar, he believed not because of what any one had told him, but upon the ground of what he himself had seen and heard and known of Jesus. "*Thou art the Christ.*" Such the Baptist said thou wert—such, though thou hast never expressly put forth the claim—such thy words and works have been ever asserting thee to be—and such thou truly art. Thus it is that in his good confession Peter suffers not the fickle faith and low conceptions of the multitude to affect him. Though he and his few companions stand alone, with the whole community against them, for himself and for them he will speak out and say, "Thou art"—not any one of those prophets, however honorable the name he bears—"Thou art the very Christ himself—the Messiah promised to our fathers."

But still another step, in taking which Peter not only confronts the existing state of popular belief as to who Jesus is, but he goes far on in advance of the existing Jewish faith as to who and what the Messiah was to be. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." We know from sufficient testimony that the Jews universally imagined that their Messiah was to be but a man—distinguished for his virtues and exalted in his office, but still a man. There has dawned on Peter's mind the idea that Jesus the Christ is something more—something higher. The voice from heaven had called him the Son of God; Satan and his host had taken up and repeated the epithet. What that title fully meant we may not, cannot, think that Peter now, or till long afterwards, understood; but that it indicated some mysterious indwelling of the Divinity—some mysterious link between Jesus and the Father which raised him high above the level of our ordinary humanity, even when endowed with all prophetic gifts—he was beginning to comprehend. Obscure though his conceptions were, there stood embodied in his great confession a testimony to the mingled humanity and divinity of Jesus. In the faith which thus expressed itself Jesus

saw the germ of all that living faith by which true believers of every age were to be animated—that faith the cherishing of which within its bosom was to form the very life and strength of the community, the Church, which he was to gather out from among the nations—the fruit of God’s own work within human souls. Seeing this, and being so far satisfied—rejoicing in the assurance that whatever other men might think or say of him, there were even now some human spirits within which he had got a hold, that nothing could shake, against which nothing would prevail—he turns to Peter and he says, “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona.” Simon Bar-jona!—the very way in which he named him preparing us for words of weighty import being about to be addressed to him. Simon Bar-jona, *blessed* art thou! I know not if Jesus Christ ever pronounced such a special individual blessing on any other single man; and when we hear one of our race called blessed by him who knows so well wherein the best and highest happiness of our nature consists, our ear opens wide to catch the reason given for such a benediction being pronounced. “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but

my Father which is in heaven." Thine own eye hath not seen it, thine own ear hath not heard it—it hath not come to thee by any ordinary channel from without—it is not due alone to an exercise of thine own spirit within. Faint though the light be that has gleamed in upon thy soul, and lighted up thy faith—faint as the feeblest glimmer of the morn—it is a light from heaven, a dawn giving promise of a bright and cloudless day. It hath come to thee as a revelation from the great Father of Spirits to thy spirit, Simon Bar-jona ; and therefore a blessed man art thou ! And blessed still in the Saviour's judgment—blessed beyond all that this world has in it of blessedness to bestow—is he upon whose darkened mind and heart the faintest rays of that same heavenly light have shone—the God who commanded the light to shine out of the darkness, shining in upon his soul, giving him the light of the true knowledge of God in Christ his Saviour !

"And I say also unto thee"—Thou hast said to me, "Thou art the Christ," and hast shown that thou knowest what is the true meaning of the word, so now say I unto thee, "Thou art Peter ;" the name of my own giving, the fitness of whose application to thee

thou art even now justifying in thy prompt and bold confession, in thy full and resolute faith, in thy firm and immovable adhesion to me, despite of all that men think and say of me. Thou art a true *Petros*—a living stone built upon me, the true *Petra*, the living and eternal rock—the only sure foundation in which you and all may build their trust and hopes. And upon thee, as such a stone resting on such a rock, as having so genuine and strong a faith in me as Son of Man and Son of God, I will build my Church. Because of this thine early, full, and heaven-implanted faith, thou shalt be honored as one of the first foundation-stones on which my Church shall be erected. That Church shall be the congregation of men who share thy faith—who all are Peters like thyself—all living stones built upon me as the chief corner-stone ; and in a sense, too, built upon thee ; on prophets and apostles as laid by me and on me, to form the basis of the great spiritual edifice—the Temple of the Church.

But if the Church was to consist of those who believed in Jesus as Peter did, where was the promise that it should number many within its embrace ? What the security that it should have any firm or lasting hold ? Was Jesus

not at this moment a wanderer—despised and rejected—driven forth from among his own—surrounded in this place of his voluntary exile among the Gentiles by a few poor fishermen? Where was the earthly hope that the circle of true believers in him should widen? What the prospect that if it did, it could hold its ground against all the gathered enmity that was rising to pour itself out against it? Calmly out of the midst of all these unpropitious and unpromising appearances, the words issue from the lips of Jesus, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” The history of eighteen centuries has confirmed the truth of the saying. So long has this society of Christian men existed; and though it has done much to provoke hostility, and been often very unmindful of the spirit and will of him whose name it bears, yet all that power and policy, the wildest intrigues and the fiercest persecution could do against it, have been done in vain.

This is the first occasion on which Jesus used that word—the Church; and he named it in his own lifetime but once again. He did everything to lay the true and only foundation of that Church; but he did almost nothing with

his own hand to direct or organize it. Apart from his selecting twelve men to be his personal associates, his institution of the office of the apostolate, which there are but few who regard as an integral and perpetual part of the Church's organization—apart from that, and his appointment of the two sacraments, Jesus may be said to have done nothing towards the incorporation of those attached to him into an external institute. Even here, when he goes to address a few words of encouragement to Peter, upon whom so important services in this department were to devolve, he speaks not of the present but of the future :—"I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." When that time comes at which, on the great day of Pentecost, the first admissions into my Church by baptism shall take place, then know that the keys of my kingdom are in thine hand, and that thou mayest use them in the full assurance that thou art not acting without a due warrant. Keys are the badges of authority and power and trust, bestowed as the symbols of the office on ministers or ambassadors, secretaries or treasurers of kingdoms ; on whom the duty lies of admitting to, or excluding from, the privileges and benefits of the commonwealth, disposing or

withdrawing the royal bounties and favor. Such keys—in a manner appropriate to the kind of commonwealth the Church is—Jesus here commits to Peter, as one of the first and greatest of its office-bearers. In the use of any such authority and power as had been given him within the Church—in admitting to or excluding from its privileges—in taking his part in the baptism of the three thousand on the day of Pentecost—in condemning Ananias and Sapphira—in censuring Simon Magus—in opening the door to take in the Gentile converts, and presiding at the baptisms in the household of Cornelius—Peter might be weighed down by the sense of the feebleness of the instrument he was using, the smallness of the effects that it could produce. To comfort and encourage him in the use of the keys when they came to be employed by him, Jesus adds, “Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Act but in the right spirit—follow out the directions given—let the law of truth and love but regulate your doings—and you may rest assured that doings of yours on earth shall be approved and ratified in heaven. So far, and no farther, as

it seems to us, do the words of our Saviour, as addressed to Peter, go. You are aware that it is upon these words—and upon them almost exclusively, for there is no other passage of anything of a like import in the evangelic narrative—the Church of Rome claims for St. Peter and his alleged successors in the See of Rome a primacy or popedom over the universal Church of Christ. Upon this claim, so far as it is attempted to be erected upon this passage, I have to remark :

1. It is singular that of the three Evangelists who have recorded our Lord's question to the apostles, and St. Peter's reply, St. Matthew is the only one who has added that which Jesus said to him after his good confession had been made. Had our Lord's object in putting the question been to elicit the confession in order thereupon to confer certain peculiar honors and privileges upon St. Peter above all the other twelve, would St. Mark and St. Luke have stopped short as they do at the confession, and said not a word about Peter and the rock—the keys and the kingdom? It is quite true that in many a narrative two of the Evangelists omit what the third has recorded ; but it is never true, as it would be true here if the Ro-

man Catholic interpretation of the passage be adopted, that all three give the initial or introductory part of a narrative, but that one alone supplies that in which the main scope and object of the whole consists.

2. The claim for a primacy of authority over the other apostles, put forward on behalf of St Peter, rests on the assumption that he, and he exclusively, is the rock upon which the Church is said to rest. I will only say that as a mere matter of exegesis—*i.e.*, of interpretation of words—it is extremely difficult to say precisely what the rock was to which Christ alluded. From the beginning, from Jerome and Origen down to our own times, there has been the greatest diversity of opinion. Did Jesus mean to say that Peter himself—individually and peculiarly—was the rock? or was it the confession that he had just made, or was it the faith to which he had given expression, or was Jesus pointing to himself when he spoke of this rock, as he did elsewhere when he spoke of this temple—this shrine—in reference to himself? I have already offered the explanation that appears to me the most simple and natural, as flowing not so much out of a critical examination of the words as out of a considera-

tion of the peculiar circumstances and conditions under which the words were spoken ; but I cannot say that I have offered that explanation without considerable hesitation—a hesitation mainly arising from the fact which does not appear in our English version, that Jesus used two different words—*Petros* and *Petra*—in speaking as he did to the Apostle. A claim which rests upon so ambiguous a declaration can scarcely be regarded as entitled to our support.

3. Whatever ambiguity there may be now to us, there could have been no such ambiguity in the words of Christ to those who heard them. They must have known whether or not Jesus meant to designate Peter as the rock—to elevate him to a peculiar and exalted position above his brethren. And yet we find that three times after this the dispute arises among them which should be the greatest—a dispute which never could have arisen had Jesus already openly and distinctly assigned the primacy to St. Peter—and a dispute, we may add, which never would have been settled as Jesus in each case settled it, had any such primacy been ever intended to be conveyed by him.

-4. Even admitting that all that is said here was said personally and peculiarly of Peter,

where is the warrant to extend it to his successors? If his associates—his fellow-apostles—be excluded, how can his successors be embraced? It is ingeniously said here by Romanists that if St. Peter be the foundation of the Church, then as that foundation must abide, there ever must be one to take his place and keep up as it were the continuity of the basis of the building. But this is to have, not one stone as the foundation, but a series of stones laid alongside or upon one another, and where is there a hint of such a thing?

Fifthly, and chiefly. All that is said here to Peter was said twice afterwards by Christ to all the twelve and to all the Church. You have but to turn to the 18th chapter of St. Matthew, and read there from the 18th to the 19th verse, and to the Gospel of St. John, and read there in the 20th chapter, from the 19th to the 23d verse, to be fully satisfied that, put what interpretation you may upon the words spoken at Cæsarea-Philippi to St. Peter, they conveyed to him no power or privilege beyond that which Jesus conferred upon the entire college of the apostles, and in its collective capacity upon the Church.*

* See *The Forty Days after our Lord's Resurrection*, pp. 103-114.

XV.

THE REBUKE OF SAINT PETER.*

JESUS had tested the faith of the Apostles. Their reply to his pointed interrogation, "But whom say ye that I am?" was so far satisfactory. They had not been influenced either by the hostility of the Pharisees or the low and unworthy imaginations of the people. They were ready to acknowledge the Messiahship of their Master, such as they understood it to be, and had risen even to some dim conception of his divinity. They were all ready to adopt the declaration of their spokesman as the expression of their faith, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

But in this faith of theirs there was one great and fatal defect. Neither they, nor any of their countrymen of that age, had associated

* Matt. xvi. 21-28; Mark viii. 31-38; ix. 1; Luke ix. 22-27.

with the advent of their Messiah any idea of humiliation, rejection, suffering, unto death. Obscure he might be in his first appearances, and difficult of recognition ; obstacles of various kinds might be thrown in his path, over which he might have laboriously to climb ; but sooner or later the discovery of who and what he was would burst upon the people, and by general acclaim he would be exalted to his destined lordship over Israel. One, coming unto his own, and by his own received not ; asking not, and getting not, any honor from men ; -walking in lowliness all his days ; a man of many and deeply-hidden griefs, misunderstood by the great mass of the people, despised and rejected by their rulers, taken, at last, to be judged and condemned as a deceiver of the people, a vilifier of Moses, a blasphemer against God ; crucified, at last, as a malefactor—it had never entered into their thoughts that such a one could be their Messiah. He might suffer somewhat, perhaps, at the hands of his own and Israel's enemies ; possibly he might have to submit to death, the common lot of all men ; but that he should suffer at the hands of the very people over whom he came to reign, and that by their hands he should be put to

death—no throne erected, and no kingdom won—this was not only alien from, it was utterly contradictory to, their conceptions and their belief. Yet all this was true: and from their earlier and false ideas the disciples had to be weaned.

Jesus did this gradually. At first, during all his previous converse with them while engaged in his public labors in Judea and Galilee, he had carefully abstained from saying anything about his approaching sufferings and death. Not that these were either unforeseen or forgotten by him. When alone in the midnight interview with Nicodemus, he could speak plainly of his being lifted up upon the cross as the brazen serpent had been upon the pole in the wilderness, that whosoever looked upon him believingly might be saved. To the people of Judea and Galilee he could drop hints, which, however obscure to his hearers, tell us of a full knowledge and foresight on his part of all that awaited him. He could point to his body as to the temple, which, though destroyed, in three days he should raise up again. He could tell his Galilean audience the sign that was to be given to that generation—that as Jonah was three days and three nights in the

whale's belly, the Son of man should be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. But never till now, in any of his private conversations with his disciples, had he alluded to this topic. He had allowed them to take off the natural and full impression which his teaching and miracle-working, and the whole tenor of his life and conversation, was fitted to make upon open, honest, devout-minded men. Their knowledge of him, their faith in him, he had left to grow, till now—as represented in the confession of St. Peter—it seemed strong enough to bear some pressure. They might now be told what it had been out of time to tell them earlier. And if they were to be told at all beforehand of the dark and tragic close, it would seem to be the very best and most fitting occasion to begin, at least, to make the disclosure to them now, when our Lord himself, ceasing from his public ministry, had sought these few days' quiet in the neighborhood of Cæsarea-Philippi, that his own thoughts might be turned to all that awaited him when he went up to Jerusalem. “From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples how he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes,

and be killed, and be raised again the third day." A few days after this, as they descended from the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus charged Peter and James and John, saying, "Tell the vision to no man till the Son of man be risen from the dead." A few days later, while they were still in Galilee, passing through it so privately that it evidenced a desire that no man should know it,* Jesus said to his disciples, "Let these sayings sink down into your hearts, for the Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men, and they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again."

After the raising of Lazarus there was a brief retreat to Peræa, till the time of the last Pass-over drew on. There was something very peculiar in the whole manner and bearing of our Lord when, leaving this retreat, he set forth on his final journey to Jerusalem. He stepped forth before his disciples, "and they were amazed, and as they followed they were afraid." It was while they were on the way thus going up to Jerusalem that he took the twelve apart, and said to them, "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the

* Mark ix. 30.

prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished ; for he shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles, and they shall mock, and shall scourge, and shall spit upon, and shall crucify him, and the third day he shall rise again.”* It thus appears that four times at least before the event—thrice in Galilee and once in Peræa—Jesus foretold with growing minuteness of detail his passion and death ; specifying the place—Jerusalem ; the time—the approaching Passover ; the agents—the chief priests, scribes, and Gentiles ; the course of procedure—his betrayal into the hands of the Jewish authorities, his delivery by them into the hands of the Gentiles ; the manner of his death—crucifixion under a judicial sentence ; some of the accompanying circumstances—the scourging, the mocking, the spitting. Any one placed in the position of Jesus—seeing the rising tide of bitter enmity, and knowing the goal at which it aimed—might have conjectured that nothing short of the death of their victim would appease the wrath of his enemies. But what mere human foresight

* Matt. xx. 17-19 ; Mark x. 32-34 ; Luke xviii. 31-34.

could have foretold, at Cæsarea-Philippi, that, Herod would not anticipate sacerdotal party, and seize upon Jesus on his way through Galilee, and crown the Baptist's murder by that of his successor? What mere human foresight could have foretold that after so many previous attempts and failures, the one at the next Passover season would succeed; that Jesus would not perish, as Stephen did, in a tumultuous outbreak; that all the formalities of a trial and condemnation would be gone through, and death by crucifixion be the result? Nor will it help to furnish us with any natural explanation of these foretellings of his sufferings and death by Jesus, to say that he gathered them from the prophecies of the Old Testament, with which we know him to have been familiar, and to which, indeed, even in these foretellings, he pointed; for, much as those prophecies did convey, they fell far short of that particularity which characterizes the sayings of our Lord. Receiving the account of the evangelists as genuine and true, we are shut up to the conclusion that in regard to his passion and death Jesus manifested beforehand a foreknowledge proper only to him who knows all ends from their beginnings; and that still

more was this the case as to his resurrection, which he predicted still oftener, and could not have predicted in plainer or less ambiguous terms.

It may for a moment appear strange that the disciples were so taken by surprise when the death and the resurrection of their Master actually took place. How could this be, we are apt to ask ourselves, after such distinct and unambiguous declarations as those which we have quoted? Let us remember, however, that the same authority which instructs us that these predictions were uttered, informs us that they were not understood by those to whom they were in the first instance addressed. "They understood not the saying, and it was hid from them, and they feared to ask him."* And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean.† The words of Jesus were in themselves easy enough to understand; but was it figuratively or literally they were to be taken? We can scarcely judge aright of the perplexity into which so unexpected an announcement must have thrown the disciples at

* Luke ix. 45.

† Mark ix. 10.

this stage of their acquaintance with Christ, nor understand how natural it was that they should explain them away. We so often see them, with other and less difficult subjects, taking what he meant literally as if it were figuratively spoken, and what he meant figuratively as if it were to be literally understood—that it takes the edge off our wonder that in this instance the disciples should have hesitated how to take the words that they had heard. The expression, “rising from the dead,” the one that appears to have perplexed them the most, appears to us one of the simplest. Yet, when we put ourselves exactly in their position, we begin to see that they had more ground for their perplexity than is at first apparent. A raising from the dead was what they had themselves witnessed. In the general resurrection of the dead they believed. There was nothing, therefore, creating any difficulty in the way of their understanding the mere literal signification of the phrase—rising from the dead. But the resurrection of Jesus—what could it mean? It could not be his sharing in the general resurrection of all the dead that he was speaking of. But was he to die and to rise and to remain risen? or to die and to rise and to die again?

He could raise others from the dead, but if he were to die, who was to raise him? Need we be surprised if, with their notions of who and what their Messiah was to be, the disciples should at times have believed that it was of some spiritual death and resurrection—some sinking into the grave and rising again of his cause and kingdom—that Jesus spoke?

At first, indeed, and before any time for reflecting upon it is given, St. Peter seizes upon the natural meaning of the words that he had heard, and interprets them generally as predicting suffering and death to his Master, and, offended at the very thought of a future so different from the one that they all had anticipated, in the heat of his surprise and indignation, buoyed up, no doubt, by the praise that had just been bestowed upon him, he forgets himself so far as actually to lay hold by arm or garment of our Lord, and in the spirit of a patron, or protector, he begins to rebuke him, saying, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee." Kindliness in the act and speech; a strong interest in Christ's mere personal welfare—but ignorance and presumption too; forgetfulness of the distance that separated him from Jesus, and a profound insensi-

bility to the higher spiritual designs which the sufferings and death of Jesus were to be the means of accomplishing. Now let us mark the manner in which this interference is regarded and treated by Christ. He turns about—he looses himself from the too familiar hold—he looks on his disciples as if craving their special notice of what he was about to say and do—and by that look having engaged their fixed regard, he says to Peter, “Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence to me.” What was the secret of the quickness, the sharpness, the stern severity of this rebuke? Why was it that, for the moment, the Apostle disappeared as it were from the Saviour’s view, and Satan, the arch-tempter, took his place? Why was it that the very word which our Lord had applied to Satan in the last and greatest of the temptations of the wilderness, is here used again, as if the great tempter had reappeared and renewed his solicitation? It was because he found the feet of Peter had actually stepped upon the very ground that Satan, in his great temptation of our Saviour, had occupied. Take all the kingdoms of the world—such had been the bribe held out—take them *now*—save thyself all the toil, the agony—let the cup pass from

thee—step into the throne without touching or tasting the bitterness of the cross. Promptly, indignantly, was this temptation repelled in the wilderness; and when it reappears in the language of his Apostle, “Be it far from thee: this shall not be unto thee”—when once again he is tempted to shrink from the sufferings and the death in store for him—as promptly and as indignantly is it again repelled, Peter being regarded as personating Satan in making it, and addressed even as the great tempter had been.

What a difference between the two sayings, uttered within a few minutes of each other! “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” “Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence”—or, as the word means, thou art a stumbling-stone, a rock of offence—“unto me.” Can it be the same man to whom words of such different import are addressed? Yes, the same man in two quickly succeeding states. Now (to the eye which seeth in secret) he appears as one whose mind the Father hath enlightened, now as one whose heart Satan has filled and occupied; now the object of praise and blessing,

now of censure and pungent rebuke. And does not this changing Peter, with those two opposite sides of his character turned so rapidly to Christ, stand a type and emblem of our weak humanity? of the ductile nature that is in the best of the followers of our Lord? of the quick transitions that so often take place within us? our souls now shone upon by the light from Heaven, now lit up with fires of another kindling? What lessons of humility and charity do such experiences in the history of the best of men inculcate!

Peter must have been greatly surprised when, shaken off by Jesus, he was spoken to as if he were the arch-fiend himself. Unconscious of anything but kindly feelings to his Master, he would be at a loss at first to know what sinful, satanic element there had been in the sentiments he had been cherishing—the words that he had used. It might at once occur to him that he had been too familiar—had used too much liberty with him whom he had just acknowledged to be the Christ, the Son of the living God. But it could surely not be simply and solely because of his being offended at the freedom taken, that Jesus had spoken to him as he did. Some light may have been thrown

upon the matter, even to Peter's apprehension at the time, by our Lord's own explanatory words: "Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men." There were two ways of looking upon those sufferings and death, of which, now for the first time, Jesus had begun to speak—the selfish, earthly, human one, and the spiritual, the divine. Peter was thinking of them solely under the one aspect, thinking of them in their bearing alone upon the personal comfort, the outward estate and condition, of his Lord. He would have Jesus avoid them. He himself would stand between them and his Master, and not suffer them to come upon him; inflicting, as he imagined they would do, such great discredit and dishonor upon his name and cause. But he knew not, or forgot, that it was for this end that Jesus came into the world, to suffer and die for sinners; that the cup could not pass from him, the cross could not be avoided, without prophecies being left unfulfilled, purposes of God left unaccomplished, the sin of man left unatoned for, the salvation of mankind left unsecured. He knew not, or forgot, that he was bringing to bear upon the humanity of our

Lord one of the strongest and subtlest of all the trials to which it was to be exposed, when in prospect of that untold weight of sorrow which was to be laid upon it in the garden and upon the cross, the instincts of nature taught it to shrink therefrom, to desire and to pray for exemption.

It was the quick and tender sense our Lord had of the peculiarity and force of this temptation, rather than his sense of singularity and depth of Peter's sinfulness, which prompted and pointed his reproof. At the same time he desired to let Peter know that the way of looking at things, in which he had been indulging, had in it that earthly, carnal element which condemned it in his sight. Nay, more ; he would seize upon the opportunity now presented, to proclaim once more, as he had so often done, that not in his own case alone, but in the case of all his true and faithful followers, suffering, self-denial, self-sacrifice, must be undergone. He had noticed the approach of a number of the people who had assembled at the sight of Jesus and his apostles passing by their dwellings. These he called to him,* as

* Mark viii. 34.

if wishing to intimate that what he had now to say, though springing out of what had occurred, and addressed in the first instance to the twelve, was yet meant for all—was to be taken up and repeated, and spread abroad, as addressed to the wide world of mankind. If any man, he said,—whosoever, whatsoever he be—will come after me, be a follower of me, not nominally, but really, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. No other way there was for me, your Redeemer, your forerunner, than by taking up the Cross appointed, and on that Cross bearing your transgressions: and no other way for you to follow me, than by each of you voluntarily and daily taking up that cross which consists in the repudiation of self-indulgence as the principle and spirit of your life, in the willing acceptance of self-denial as the fixed condition of the new life's growth and progress in your souls, in the crucifying of every sinful affection and desire. "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's shall save it." Let it be your main, supreme, engrossing object, to save your life; to guard yourself against its ills, to secure its benefits, its wealth, its honors, its enjoy-

ments—the end shall be that the very thing you seek to save you certainly shall lose. But if from a supreme love to Christ, and a predominating desire to please him, you are willing to lose life, to give up anything which he calls you to give up, the end shall be that the very thing that you were ready to lose, you shall at last and most fully gain. For take it even as a mere matter of profit and loss—but weigh aright what is thrown into the scale, when you are balancing earthly and eternal interests—“What is a man profited if he gain the whole world?” No man ever did so; but suppose he did, imagine that one way or other the very whole, the sum total that this world,—its pursuits, its possessions, its enjoyments, can do to make one happy, were grasped by one single pair of arms into one single bosom, would it profit him, would he be a gainer if, when the great balance was struck, it should be found—that in gaining the whole world he had lost his own soul? that it had been lost to God and to all its higher duties, and so lost to happiness and lost forever? For if a man once lose his soul, where shall he find an equivalent in value for it? where shall he find that by which it can be redeemed or bought again;

what shall he find or give in exchange for his soul? Too true, alas! it is, that, clear though this simplest of all questions of profit and loss be, many will not work it out, or apply it to their own case, content to grasp what is nearest, the present, the sensible, the earthly, and to overlook the more remote, the unseen, the spiritual, the eternal. Too true that what hinders many from a hearty and full embrace of Christ and all the blessings of his salvation, is a desire to go with the multitude; a shrinking, through shame, from anything that would separate them from the world. Would that upon the ears of such the solemn words of our Lord might fall with power—"Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels."* And at that coming, when the earth and the heavens shall pass away, and we shall find ourselves standing before the great white throne, and in the presence of that vast community of holy beings, what will it look then to have been ashamed of Jesus now? What will it be then to find him ashamed of us, disowning us?

How strangely must this about the Son of man so coming with power and great glory, have sounded in the ears of those who had just been listening to him as he told how that he must suffer many things, and be killed and be raised again the third day! Beyond that time of dishonor and suffering and death, predicted as so near, here was another advent of the Son of man, around which every circumstance of glory and honor was to be thrown. But when was that advent to be realized? Of the day and the hour of its coming no man was to know; but this much about it Jesus might even now reveal, that there were some standing then before him who should not taste of death till they saw the kingdom of God set up, till they saw Jesus coming in his kingdom. It could not be of his personal and final advent to judgment that Jesus meant here to speak, for that was not to occur within the lifetime of any of that generation. Those, besides, who were to be alive and to be witnesses of that advent were never to taste of death. Jesus could only mean to speak of such a visible institution of his kingdom as should carry with it a prelude and prophecy of the great consummation. As it is now known that of the

twelve apostles John and Philip alone survived the great catastrophe of the destruction of Jerusalem, when the Judaic economy which Christ's kingdom was meant to supersede was set aside, it has been generally believed that it was to that particular epoch or event that Jesus here referred. If we reflect, however, that it was to the general audience by whom he was at the time surrounded, and not exclusively to the twelve, that Jesus addressed these words, we may be the more disposed to believe that it was to the general fact of the open establishment of his kingdom upon earth—that kingdom which was erected on the day of Pentecost, and which came forth more conspicuously into notice when the Jewish ceremonial expired, and it took its place—that our Saviour alluded. Some of those to whom Jesus was speaking at Cæsarea-Philippi were to witness the setting up of this kingdom within the souls of men, and in its setting were to behold the visible pledge that he would come again the second time, to bring the present economy of things to its close.

Let us apply the saying of our Lord in this way to ourselves. He has a kingdom, not distinguished now by any tokens of external splen-

dor—his kingdom within the soul. Before we taste of death we may, we ought, to know that kingdom, to enter into it, be enrolled as its subjects, be partakers of its privileges and blessings. And if so by faith we see and own our Lord, yielding ourselves up to him as the Christ, the Son of the living God, who has come in the name of the Lord to save us, then when we close our eyes in death, we may do so in the humble confidence that when he comes in his own glory, and the glory of the Father, and the glory of the holy angels, we shall not be ashamed before him at his coming, and he shall not be ashamed of us, but shall welcome us into that kingdom which shall never be moved, whose glory and whose blessedness shall be full, unchangeable, eternal.

XVI.

THE TRANSFIGURATION.*

SIX days elapsed after our Lord's first foretelling of his approaching death. These days were spent in the region of Cæsarea-Philippi, and appear to have passed without the occurrence of any noticeable event ; days, however, they undoubtedly would be of great perplexity and sadness to the disciples. They had so far modified their first beliefs and expectations, that they were ready to cleave to their Master in the midst of prevalent misconception and enmity. But this new and strange announcement that he must go up to Jerusalem, not only to be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, but to be put to death and raised again the third day, has disturbed their

* Matt. xvii. 1-13 ; Mark ix. 2-13 ; Luke ix. 28-36.

faith, and filled their hearts with sorrowful anxieties—a disturbance and anxiety chiefly, we may believe, experienced by those three of the twelve already admitted by Jesus to more intimate fellowship and confidence. The six days over, bringing no relief, Jesus takes these three “up into a high mountain apart.”

Standing upon the height which overlooks Cæsarea-Philippi, I looked around upon the towering ridges which Great Hermon, the Sheikh of the Mountains, as the Arabs call it, projects into the plain. Full of the thought that one of these summits on which I gazed had in all probability witnessed the Transfiguration, I had fixed upon one of them which, from its peculiar position, form, and elevation, might aptly be spoken of as a “high mountain apart,” when casting my eye casually down along its sides as they sloped into the valley, the remains of three ancient villages appeared dotting the base. I remembered how instantly on the descent from the mountain Jesus had found himself in the midst of his disciples and of the multitude, and was pleased at observing that the mountain-top I had fixed upon met all the requirements of the Gospel narrative. If that were, indeed, the mountain-top up to which

Jesus went, he never stood so high above the level of the familiar lake, nor did his eye ever sweep so broadly the hills of Galilee. Whichever the mountain was, the shades of evening were falling as Jesus climbed its sides. He loved, we know, the stillness of the night, the solitude of the mountain. He sought them for the purposes of devotion—in the loneliness, the calmness, the elevation, finding something in harmony with prayer. Generally, however, on such occasions he was alone. He either sent his disciples away, or managed to separate himself from their society. Now, however, as anticipating what was about to happen, he takes with him Peter and James and John, the destined witnesses of his humiliation and agony in the garden. The sun sinks in the west beneath the waters of the Great Sea as the top of the mountain is reached. Night begins to draw its mantle round them, wrapping in obscurity the world below. Jesus begins to pray. The three who rest a little space away from him would join in his devotions, but wearied with the ascent, less capable of resisting the coming-on of night and the pressure of fatigue, their eyes grow heavy till they close in sleep—the last sight they rest on, that sombre figure of

their Master ; the last sound on their listening ear, the gentle murmur of his ascending prayers. From this sleep they waken, not at the gentle touch of the morning light, not to look down upon the plain below, seen under the beams of the rising day : with stroke of awakening power, a bright, effulgent radiance has fallen upon their eyelids, and as they lift them up, while all is dark below, the mountain-top is crowned with light, and there before them now there are three forms : their Master —“the fashion of his countenance altered”—his face shining as the sun—lit up, not alone, as the face of Moses once was, by the lingering reflection of the outward glory upon which it had gazed, but illumined from within, as if the hidden glory were bursting through the fleshy veil and kindling it into radiance as it passed —his raiment shining, bright as the glistening snow that lay far above them upon the highest top of Hermon—exceeding white, so as no fuller on earth could whiten them ; and beside him, appearing, too, in glory, yet in glory not like his—dimmer and less radiant—their forms, their attitudes, their words all showing that they came to wait on him and do him homage —Moses the Lawgiver, and Elijah the Reformer

or Restorer of the Jewish theocracy. Whence came they? In what form did they now appear? How came Peter and James and John at once to recognize them? They came from the world of the dead, the region that departed spirits occupy. Elijah did not need to borrow for this occasion his old human form. He had carried that with him in the chariot of fire—the corruptible then changed into the incorruptible—the mortal having then put on immortality; and now in that transfigured body he stands beside the transfigured form of Jesus. Moses had died, indeed, and was once buried; but no man knew where nor how, nor can any man now tell us in what bodily or material shape it was that he now appeared, nor what there was if anything about the external appearance either of him or of Elijah which helped the apostles to the recognition. In some way unknown the recognition came. It was given them to know who these two shining strangers were. It was given them to listen to and so far to understand the converse they were holding with Jesus as to know that they were speaking to him about the de cease he was to accomplish at Jerusalem. But it was not given to them either immediately or any time thereafter to re-

port, perhaps even to remember, the words they heard. We must remain content with knowing nothing more about that conversation—which, whether we think of the occasion, or the speakers, or the subject-matter, appears to us as the sublimest ever held on earth—than generally what its topic was.

But of what great moment even that information is we shall presently have to speak. Their mysterious discourse with Jesus over, Moses and Elias make a movement to retire. Peter will not let them go—will detain them if he can. He might not have broken in upon his Master while engaged in converse with them, but now that they seem about to withdraw, in the fullness of his ecstatic delight, with a strong wish to detain the strangers, a dim sense that they were in an exposed and shelterless place, and a very vain imagination that the affording of some better protection might perhaps induce them to stay, and that if they did they might all take up their permanent dwelling here together, he cannot but exclaim, “Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles (three arbors or forest tents of the boughs of the neighboring trees ;) one for thee, and one for Moses, and

one for Elias." Not knowing what he said, the words are just passing from his babbling lips, when the eye that follows the retreating figures is filled with another and a brighter light. A cloud comes down upon the mountain-top—a cloud of brightness—a cloud which, unfolding its hidden treasures, pours a radiance down upon the scene that throws even the form of the Redeemer into shadow, and in the darkness of whose excessive light the forms of Moses and Elias sink away and disappear. This cloud is no other than the Shekinah, the symbol of Jehovah's gracious presence. From the midst of its excellent glory, there comes the voice, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him,"—not Moses, nor Elias, nor any other lawgiver, nor any other prophet,—but hear ye him. As the apostles hear that voice they are sore afraid; the strength goes out of them, and they fall with their faces to the ground. Jesus comes, touches them. The touch restores their strength. He says, "Arise, and be not afraid." They spring up; they look around. The voices have ceased, the forms have vanished, the glory is gone; they are alone with Jesus as at the first.

Such as we have now recited them were the incidents of the Transfiguration. Let us consider now its scope and design. In the shaded history of the man of sorrows, this one passage stands out so unique—a single outburst of light and glory on the long track of darkness—that we look at it with the most intense curiosity ; and as we look the questions start to our lips, Why was it that for that one brief season the brow that was to be crowned with thorns was crowned with glory, the countenance that was to be marred and spit upon shone as the sun, the raiment that was to be stripped off and divided among foreign soldiers became so bright and glistening? Why was it that he who ere long was to be seen hanging up to die between the two malefactors, was now and thus to be seen, with Moses and Elias standing by his side paying to him the most profound obeisance? Why did that clouded glory come down and glide across the mountain-top, and that voice of the Infinite Majesty speak forth its awful and authoritative, yet instructive and encouraging words? In answer to these questions, we must say that we know too little of the world of spirits to take it upon us to conjecture or to affirm what it was, so far as they person-

ally were concerned, or the community of which they formed a part, which brought Moses and Elias from their places of abode in the invisible world to stand and talk for this short season with Jesus on the mount. Doubtless the benefit, as the honor, to them was singular and great, involving a closer approach to, a nearer fellowship with, Jesus in his glorified estate, than was ever made or enjoyed by any other of our race on earth, than may be made or enjoyed even by the redeemed in heaven. But we venture not to specify or define what the advantage was which was thus conferred. We know too little also of the inner history and of the human mind of the man Christ Jesus, to say how seasonable, how serviceable this brief translation into the society of the upper sanctuary may have been—what treasures of strength and comfort fitting him for the approaching hour and power of darkness, the solemn announcement of his sonship by the Father, the declaration of satisfaction with all his earthly work, may have conveyed into his soul. Doubtless here, too, there were purposes of mercy and grace towards the redeemer subserved, which it is difficult for us to apprehend, more difficult for us fully to fathom. But there

is another region lying far more open to our inspection than either of those now indicated. It is not difficult to perceive how the whole scene of the transfiguration was ordered so as to fortify and confirm the apostles' faith. That it had this as one of its immediate and more prominent objects is evident, from the simple fact that Peter, James, and John were taken up to the mount to witness it. Not for Christ's own sake alone, nor for the sake of Moses and Elias alone, but for their sake also, was this glimpse of the glorified condition of our Lord afforded; and when we set ourselves deliberately to consider what the obstructions were which then lay in the way of a true faith on their part in Christ, we can discern how singularly fitted, in its time, its mode, and all attendant circumstances, it was to remove these obstructions, and establish them in that faith.

1. It helped them to rise to a true conception of the dignity of the Saviour's person. The humbleness of Christ's birth, his social estate, the whole outward manner and circumstances of his life created then a prejudice against him and his claims to the Messiahship, the force of which it is now difficult to compute: "Can there any good thing come out of

Nazareth?" was the question not of a captious scribe or a hostile Pharisee, but of an Israelite indeed, in whom there was no guile. "Is not this the carpenter's son?" was the language of those who had been intimate with him from his birth when they heard him in their synagogue apply the memorable passage in the prophecies of Isaiah to himself—"Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary, and his brothers James and Joses, and Simon and Judas; and his sisters, are they not all with us? And they were offended in him." In the case of his own disciples, his character, his teaching, his miracles, his life fully satisfied them that he was that Prophet who was to be sent. Yet the very familiarity of their daily intercourse with him as a man stood in the way of their rising to the loftier conception of his divinity. Besides, had no such incident as that of the Transfiguration occurred in the Saviour's history, we can well conceive how at this very stage they might have been thrown into a condition of mind and feeling exactly the reverse of that of their countrymen at large. Blinded by pride and prejudice, the Jews generally would not look at those Scriptures which spoke of a suffering,

dying Messiah, but fixing their eyes alone upon those glowing descriptions given by their prophets of the majesty of his person and the glory of his reign, they cast aside at once and indignantly the pretensions of the son of the carpenter. Now, for the first time, the idea of his suffering unto death was presented to the minds of his own disciples. Afterwards they were more fully instructed out of the writings of Moses and the prophets how it behoved Christ to suffer all these things, and then to enter into his glory. But the glory of which so much had been foretold—that bright side of the prophetic picture—what was it, and when and how was it to be revealed? Here again, just when their faith was widened in one direction, in another it might have begun to falter. To meet all the trials of their position, in mercy to all their weaknesses, one sight was given of the Lord's transfigured form; one visible manifestation of the place he held in the invisible kingdom; one glimpse of the heavenly glory, with Jesus standing in the midst. Sense stretched out its vigorous hand to lay hold of blind and staggering Faith. And long afterwards—thirty years and more from the time that the great manifestation was

made—in Peter's person, Faith, when she had got over all her difficulties and stood serene, secure, triumphant, looked back and owned the debt, and published abroad her obligation, saying, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice we heard when we were with him in the holy mount."

2. The position which Christ assumed towards the Jewish priesthood and the Mosaic ritual was not a little perplexing—his habitual neglect of some, his open and severe condemnation of other religious observances sanctioned by the highest ecclesiastical authorities, regarded generally as of divine origin and authority, and rigorously observed by all who made any pretensions to piety. He wore no phylacteries—he made no long prayers—neither he nor his disciples fasted—he and they ate with unwashed hands—he sat down with publicans and sinners—in many ways, according

to the current ideas, he and his disciples broke the Sabbath—he separated himself from the priesthood—he walked not in their ways—he discountenanced many of their practices—he taught and he practised a religion that made but little of holy rites and outward orderly observances. The religion of the heart, the home, the secret chamber, the broad highway, the solitary mountain-side—a religion that in its heavenward aspects opened a way direct for any sinner of our race to God as his heavenly Father—that in its earthward aspects found its sphere and occupation in the faithful and kindly discharge to all around of the thousand nameless duties of human brotherhood:—such religion the Scribes, the Pharisees, the hierarchy, the whole body of the Jewish priesthood, disliked; they looked askance upon it and upon its author; took up the tale against Jesus—many of them no doubt believing it—and circulated it—that this man was an enemy of Moses, was ill-affected to the Law and to the Prophets, was an innovator, a revolutionist. To see and hear their Master thus arraigned, and with much apparent reason too, as one throwing himself into a hostile attitude towards all the venerated popular superstitions,

must have been not a little trying to our Lord's apostles. But if there entered into their minds a doubt as to the actual inner spiritual harmony between their Master's teaching, and that of Moses and the prophets, the vision of the mount—the sight of Moses and Elias, the founder and the restorer, the two chief representatives of the old covenant, appearing in glory, entering into such fellowship with Jesus, owning him as their Lord, must have cleared it away—satisfying them by an ocular demonstration that their Master came not to destroy the law and the prophets—not to destroy, but to fulfill.

3. The manner of Christ's death was, of itself, a huge stumbling-block in the way of faith—one over which, notwithstanding all that had been done beforehand to prepare them, the apostles at first stumbled and fell. And yet one might have thought that the conversation which Peter, James, and John overheard upon the mount, might have satisfied them that a mysterious interest hung around that death—obscure to the dull eyes of ordinary mortals, but very visible to the eyes of the glorified. It formed the one and only topic of that sublimest interview that ever took place

on earth. And doubtless, when the apostles recovered from the first shock of the Crucifixion, and, under Christ's and the Spirit's teaching, the meaning and object of the great sacrifice for human guilt effected by that death revealed itself, and they began to remember all that the Lord had told them of it, and the seal of silence that had been put upon the lips of Peter, James, and John was broken—when they could not only tell that it was about this decease, and about it alone, that Moses and Elias had spoken to their Lord, but knew now why it was that it formed the only selected topic of discourse—that recalled conversation of the holy mount would contribute to fix their eyes in adoring gratitude upon the Cross, and to open their lips, as they determined to know nothing among their fellow-men but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

The peculiar way in which Jesus spake of his relationship to God was another great difficulty in the way of faith. It seemed so strange, so presumptuous, so blasphemous, for a man—with nothing to mark him off as different from other men—to speak of God as his Father, not in any figurative or metaphorical sense, not as any one, every one of his creatures might do,

but in such a sense as obviously to imply oneness of nature, of attributes, of authority, of possession. How, against all the counter forces that came into play against it, was a faith in his true sonship to the Father to be created and sustained? They had his word, his character, his works to build upon. But knowing the frailty of that spirit within which the faith had to be built up, God was pleased to add another evidence, even that of his personal and audible testimony. And so from that cloudy glory which hung for a few moments above the mountain-top, his own living voice was heard authenticating all that Jesus had said, or was to say, of the peculiar relationship to him in which he stood, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye him."

Once before, at the Baptism, had the voice of the Father been heard uttering the same testimony—confirming the same great fact or truth. What more could the Father do than break the silence so long preserved, bow the heavens and come down, take into his lips one of our human tongues, and in words that men could understand, thus twice and so solemn-

ly declare, that this Jesus of Nazareth—this unique sojourner upon our earth—was no other than his only begotten, his well-beloved Son, to whom, above all others, we were to open our ears, to hear and to believe, to obey and to be blessed? In shape of mere sensible demonstration, could faith ask a higher, better proof?

What then may we not say as we contemplate the single but strong help to faith given in this one brilliant passage of our Redeemer's life? What hath God not done to win the faith of the human family in Jesus Christ as his Son our Saviour? If miracles of wonder could have done it; if lights seen on earth that were kindled before the sun, and forms seen on earth that had passed into the heavens, and the very voice heard on earth that spake and it was done, that commanded and all things stood fast, could have done it—it had been done long ago. But, alas! for hearts so slow and hard as ours, we need Christ to be revealed to us by the Spirit, as well as revealed outwardly by the Father, ere to that great saying of his upon the mount we make the right response, looking upon Jesus and saying, "Truly

this is the Son of God—my Lord, my God, my one and only Saviour—with whom I, too, am well pleased, and through whom I humbly trust that the Father will be well pleased with me !”



NOTE.

EXTRACT FROM A JOURNAL KEPT BY THE AUTHOR DURING A
VISIT TO THE HOLY LAND IN THE SPRING OF THE YEAR
1863.

Thursday, 23d April.—Our first sight of the Sea of Galilee was from the top of Tabor. The next was during our descent this evening to Tiberias from the elevated ground around Kurin-Hattin. The climate changed sensibly as we descended, and the vegetation altered. We had been under considerable alarm as to the suffocating heat we were to meet with in Tiberias, and the attacks of vermin to which we were to be exposed. Instead of entering the town, or encountering the dreaded enemy in his stronghold, where he musters, we are told, in great force, we pitched our tents in an airy situation on the banks of the lake, where we suffered no annoyance of any kind. Beautiful it was, as the sun went down and the stars shone out, to look upon the waters, and to remember that they were the waters of the Lake of Galilee.

Friday, 24th.—A showery night, trying our tents, which stood out well—but little rain having got en-

trance. The day cleared up after breakfast, and at eleven o'clock we went on board the boat which we had secured the night before to be at our disposal during our stay here. Rowed along the southwestern shores of the lake. The hills that rise here from the shore are lofty, some of them 1200 or 1300 feet high. Landed for a while on a beautiful pebbly beach in a little bay on the shores of which are scattered the ruins of the ancient Tarichœa. Within the small enclosure of the bay—less than a quarter of a mile across—indenting not more than one hundred yards the general shore line, Josephus tells us of more than two hundred vessels being gathered for the only naval engagement between the Jews and Romans. What an idea does this present of the former populousness of these now silent and almost boatless waters! Bathed in the lake, and lay on the shore gathering shells. Took boat again, and rowed to the southern end of the lake, where the Jordan leaves it, and, true to its tortuous character, bends right and left as it issues from the lake. Rowed across here, and landed on the eastern shore. We had intended making a minute survey of the southeastern banks, the general belief having so long been that somewhere upon them was the scene of our Lord's cure of the demoniac of Gadara. A careful inspection of what lay quite open to view at once convinced us that it could not have been at any place on the eastern side of the lake south of Wady Fik, which lies nearly opposite Tiberias, that the miracle was wrought, for there is no steep place whatever at or near the lake-side down which the swine could have run violently. For a long way inland the country is level—never rising to any eight as would answer to the description in the

Gospel narrative. There is a Gadara, indeed, in this neighborhood, but it is at a great distance from the lake. It would take three hours to reach it, and the gorge of the river Jermak intervenes. It cannot have been the Gadara near to which the tombs were, out of which the inhabitants came immediately on hearing what had happened on the lake side. A single look at Kurbit-es-Sularah (Hippos) must satisfy every observer that it could not possibly have been there, nor anywhere in its immediate neighborhood, that the incidents occurred connected with the healing of the demoniac. We rowed back in the evening to our tents, thoroughly satisfied that in this instance the existence of a place called Gadara lying south of the lake had exercised a misleading influence. It remained for us to examine the eastern side of the lake, above the point at which we now left it. This we resolved to do the next day. . . .

Saturday, 26th.—Rowed across to Wady Fik, the first place along the eastern shore coming up from the south at which the miracle could have been performed. On landing, we asked our boatmen whether there were any tombs in the wady. Their answer was to point us to a very old burying-ground, scarcely a hundred yards from the place where we landed, which told its own story by the stones scattered over it. We scarcely needed to ask whether there were any remains of towns or villages near; for, looking to our right, on the slope of a hill about quarter of a mile off, the ruins of a village were to be seen,—a very old village our guide told us it was,—its name, as he pronounced it, Kurban, or Dharban, or Goorban, we could not exactly say which. Immediately fronting us was a lofty conical height, with the

steepest line of descent we had yet seen. This height was connected by a narrow shoulder of land with the line of hills behind, which here decline so rapidly to the shore, that either along their sides, or down the still steeper side of the semi-detached and conical eminence in the mouth of the wady, the swine may have run. There is indeed a level space, of no great extent however, between the shore and the bottom of the hills and of this eminence, but it might easily have been that under the impulse of the demoniac possession, and urged by the impetus given in so long and so rapid a descent, the swine might have been hurried across the space into the water. There is, in fact, no steep place along the whole eastern shore which runs sheer down into the water. Here, then, in Wady Fik, we had enough to satisfy all the requirements of the narrative : tombs so placed that immediately on Christ's landing a man might have come out of them ; a mountain near, on which two thousand swine might have been feeding ; a height down which they might have run so violently as to be driven into the sea ; and a village at hand to which the tidings might easily be carried. It remained for us, however, to visit Wady Semakh—the site fixed on by Dr. Thomson as the scene of the event. Here, too, more than one of the conditions required by the narrative were fully met : on the hill-side, to the right of the valley, were caves used formerly as tombs ; between us and them, as we stood upon the shore, were the remains of an old village, while away at a considerable distance on our right was a slope of a mountain side that might have served for the descent. The tombs, however, were too far off. Their position relative to the village scarcely corresponded with the nar-

native, from which one would naturally infer that the village lay behind,—the word needing to be carried to it. On the whole, after the fairest and fullest comparison we could institute, our decision was that it was in Wady Fik, and not in Wady Semakh, that the incidents of the strange healing occurred.*

The closer survey, however, that we were now able to make of Wady Semakh, strengthened the impression that eye and glass had conveyed to us—as from the other side we had studied the eastern shores of the lake—that it was in its neighborhood that the feeding of the five thousand took place. Let any one run his eye from the entrance of the Jordan into the lake, down the eastern shore, and he will notice that all along the land rises with a gentle and gradual slope; never till miles behind rising into anything that could be called a mountain; never showing any single height with a marked distinction from or elevation above the others, so separate and so secluded that it could with propriety be said that Jesus went up to that mountain apart to pray. Wherever Capernaum was, to pass over from it to these slopes on the northeastern shore traditionally regarded as the scene of the miracle, could scarcely be said to be a crossing over to the other side of the lake. But Wady Semakh presents the very kind of place required by the record of the events. Looking up into it, with high mountains on either side, with lesser valleys dividing them from one another, presenting a choice to any one who sought an elevated privacy on a mountain top for prayer,—and turning our eye upon the many plateaux or nearly level places, carpeted at this season

* See *Sinai and Palestine*, p. 380.

of the year with grass, my companion, Dr. Keith Johnston, and I were both persuaded that our eyes were resting on the neighborhood where the great and gracious display of the Divine power was made in the feeding of the multitude.







